The Drama League Series

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

By

TRACY D. MYGATT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CLARA FITCH

Pacific School of Religion
Berkeley, Calif.

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NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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Author of "Good Friday: A Passion Play of Now," "Bird's Nest," "Grandmother Rocker," "The Noose," etc.

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TO MY MOTHER

IN GRATEFUL LOVE FOR HER DEAR FAITH
IN THIS AND ALL MY WORK,
THIS PLAY IS DEDICATED.

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INTRODUCTION

By CLARA FITCH

CHAIRMAN OF THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA COMMITTEE
OF THE DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Religious Drama is quickening the spiritual life of communities to-day as it did in the early days of the Church. The revival of this form of drama at the close of the World War was suggested by the Drama League of America as a means of carrying over into everyday life the awakened conscience of the people. A Religious Drama Committee was called by the League to discuss the subject in the broadest use of the term, the aim being, to secure plays of Biblical and ethical value, plays capable of stimulating high ideals. As the supply of such material was inadequate the League held a religious drama prize competition to secure worth while plays, and to arouse interest in the subject. The result was satisfactory and valuable material was gained. Selected plays from this competition are to appear in a Drama League Series, "Children of Israel," the title of this volume, being one of the series.

Churches eagerly adopted the League's idea of utilizing drama in church work, realizing that the Church alone does not offer the balanced recreation that people crave, and that the art of the drama appealing to the triple nature of man is of inestimable value in supplying this need. The movement has grown so rapidly that it will be necessary to correlate the work of the Drama League, various churches and organizations working in the field of religious drama, that effort may not be duplicated and that the high ideals for which the League stands may be maintained.

If religion is to be taught through dramatics, an able leader is essential, one who is not only fitted mentally but spiritually. Such a leader must know that simplicity in stage set and cos-

tuming is desirable, that the actors should lose themselves in speaking the lines of the play, and the audience cease for a time to be conscious of present-day reality.

"Children of Israel" is a Biblical Drama in Three Acts. The principal characters of the play are Moses; Miriam, his sister; Aaron, their brother; Zipporah, Moses' wife; Dathan, a Hebrew slave; Pharaoh, King of Egypt; and Thermuthis, his daughter. The ancient theme of the bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt is skillfully handled and makes a strong appeal; the style is vigorous, and the delineation of character excellent. Occasional humorous passages contrast forcibly with the tragedy of Thermuthis and the prophetic vision and fire of Miriam. The dramatic situation offered by the plague of thick darkness is strongly developed. Historically accurate is the Passover scene and the religious symbols are used reverently.

The play is bound together by the forward gaze of Moses and Miriam, which is the keynote of their power over the people.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STAGING "CHILDREN OF ISRAEL" FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION

By ELIZABETH B. GRIMBALL

DIRECTOR OF PLAYS AND PAGEANTS, MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION ON CHURCH PAGEANTRY AND DRAMA OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF AMERICA

While Miss Mygatt's "Children of Israel" would show to best advantage in presentation by a cast of good professional actors with settings arranged by fine professional designers and technical directors, the drama also lends itself to production with a non-professional cast of well-trained amateurs under a good director in the amateur field who is not only a competent coach but who understands the technical problems of staging, costuming and lighting.

For production in the field of Community Drama, where facilities for staging are often inadequate, the play can also be used if certain suggestions are followed.

The text in the professional copy calls for extremely delicate interpretation dramatically and scenic effects of great beauty but difficult to carry out under the usual conditions found in the average community.

These difficulties may be overcome if some of the scenes be adapted or omitted where the omission does not break the dramatic sequence; and the staging simplified as much as possible into a mere background, leaving the color, lighting and costuming to give historic and symbolic verity to the story.

There are certain conditions upon which the dramatic movement depends and these conditions must be fulfilled. For example the development of the mystery element in the play depends on the lessening of light and the glow of the Pillar of Fire;

therefore it is necessary to produce the play under artificial light, and this precludes any day performances out of doors.

The accuracy of the place and the period in a simple production must be conveyed visually entirely by the costumes and properties. Therefore the director of a presentation of "Children of Israel" for the Church or for the Community by non-professionals has three definite problems on the technical side which he must reduce to the simplest representations for his purpose.

The first is costuming. This difficult work can be made a most interesting feature if the art forces of a community are called to his aid and a workshop established where the costumes may be designed and made. If a knowledge of how to use brilliant dyes is the possession of the director or one of his helpers, inexpensive materials can be made to take on the glory of oriental splendor—and if a knowledge of applied decoration, stenciling, and block printing batik is also the gift of some helper, the costume problem is solved.

The second problem is setting in its simplest form, with the properties and furnishing necessary to the dramatic action.

The play may be played without drapes or against a background of drapes—two or three, set at sufficient distance from each other to allow the setting up within the inner space of certain set properties such as Pharaoh's throne. When the outer curtain, which should be in two pieces, is drawn apart, the inner setting is shown. When drapes are not used properties may be placed by attendants in costume of slaves. For a performance out of doors large screens may be used, which could be placed and taken away by attendants in costume.

The third technical problem is the lighting. The effects required by the play may be obtained with the use of simple flood lights on a dimmer and, if necessary, a strip of hooded footlights. These lights may be rented or they may be made by any electrician according to simple directions.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MOSES
MIRIAM, *his sister*
AARON, *their brother*
ZIPPORAH, *Moses' wife*
GERSHOM, ELEASAR } *Moses' children*
DATHAN, *a Hebrew slave*
PHARAOH, *King of Egypt*
THERMUTHIS, *his daughter*
ZITYNE, *maid to Thermuthis*
EPIPHRAS, *an Egyptian messenger*
BATINAS, *a taskmaster*
NICORDION, *his brother*
CHIEF MAGICIAN
1ST MUSICIAN
1ST TORCHBEARER
1ST GUARD
2ND GUARD

A dancing-girl; ladies and gentlemen of the court; soothsayers; magicians; guards; a torchbearer; Hebrew slaves; servants; Egyptian task-masters.

TIME: *Before the Exodus*
PLACE: *The City of Rameses*

ACT I: *A Street in Rameses*
ACT II: *Pharaoh's Throne-Chamber*
ACT III: *The Home of Moses*

Between Acts I and II some twelve years pass; between Acts II and III some four days.

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

ACT I

SCENE: *A Street in Rameses.*
TIME: *Before the Exodus.*

The scene is a street in Rameses somewhere between the brick-fields and the new pleasure-garden of PHARAOH. *In the distance gleams the Nile, hot in the sunshine; beyond it loom the dim, piled forms of Sphinx and Pyramids. As the curtain rises, a line of Hebrew slaves, almost naked, their seamed bodies bent under heavy tales of brick, pass slowly across stage, left. They are closely watched and goaded forward by Egyptian Taskmasters who meet their cries of suffering with the lash. Now and then, as in his torment, a slave attempts to raise piteous hands in prayer, the lash descends with so quick a ferocity that he stumbles forward again, submissive and still. A moment after the line has passed beyond the mound of sand which is partially visible to left rear,* DATHAN, *the slave who has been at the last of the procession, reels back again, almost fainting, and falls upon the stage, centre. Instantly* BATINAS, *the Egyptian Taskmaster, who has made an insolent rearguard of the whole, is upon him, savoring his delight in now at last being afforded a pretext for fresh cruelties.*

BATINAS. [*Brandishing his lash.*] Ha-ha, my fine fellow! So you thought you'd run away!

DATHAN. [*Crouching beneath the lash.*] No, no, master! Thou art wrong! I——

BATINAS. [*Prodding him with his boot.*] Tush! You're a great one, aren't you, to think of running away?

DATHAN. [*Piteously.*] But, master, I swear I——

BATINAS. [*Jeeringly, cracking the whip.*] Thought you'd take a bit of a stroll, didn't you? See the sights of the city?

DATHAN. [*As before.*] Master, master, by the Holy God, thou art wrong! I fainted from the heat and——

BATINAS. [*With a loud guffaw.*] He's a great one, isn't He, your "Holy God"! To let you stick—how many hundred moons is it?—building treasure-cities for your enemies, with gentlemen like me over you! "Holy God" indeed! [*With another kick.*] Now if you prayed to the Nile [*swiftly prostrating himself*]—there's a god can *do* something for you!

[*He is about to continue when* ZITYNE, *the extraordinarily pretty maid of the* PRINCESS THERMUTHIS, *enters, right. At sight of her, he looks up, pleased that she should have caught him in so heroic an employment.*

BATINAS. Good afternoon, Miss Zityne! Can I do anything for you?

ZITYNE. [*With light disdain.*] Oh, pray don't trouble about me! You seem to have your hands pretty full!

BATINAS. [*Carelessly.*] My hands can always hold more [*with a bold glance*]—like my heart!

ZITYNE. [*Mockingly.*] And do you have to make as much effort to hold what you put in your heart as your hands are making now with that slave?

BATINAS. [*With a savage stroke that reduces* DATHAN *to immobility.*] Effort? Nay! She who comes to the heart of Batinas is glad to rest there—even as this Jew now, beneath his lash!

ZITYNE. [*Raising her eyebrows.*] A pleasure to be destroyed by Batinas? Oh, I don't know about that! [*Tossing her head.*] I'm delighted *I'm* not in your heart! I'd much rather be in the service of the Princess! [*Turning to* DATHAN.] What is thy name?

DATHAN. [*With a groan.*] Dathan——!

ZITYNE. Poor slave, I could almost pity thee—if thou wert not a slave!

DATHAN. There is no pity in Egypt, nor compassion in the house of bondage!

BATINAS. [*Tickling his face with the lash.*] Where else would you be? You Jews! You're all the same!

ZITYNE. [*Suddenly.*] Not Prince Moses!

BATINAS. Oh, well, he's an Egyptian!

DATHAN. [*Starting.*] Nay——!

ZITYNE. No, he isn't an Egyptian! He never worships with us!

BATINAS. [*Familiarly.*] With you? Why should he?

ZITYNE. [*With dignity.*] I referred to the Princess Thermuthis and Pharaoh her father! Prince Moses never goes with them to the Temple of Osiris!

BATINAS. Oh, well, he's an Egyptian all the same!

DATHAN. [*Starting up.*] Nay, thou liest! He——

BATINAS. [*Lashing him.*] Oh, I do! Well, let us see! Canst thou tell me of one time—even one, in all the years of thy slavery that Prince Moses ever troubled himself to——

ZITYNE. [*Interrupting softly.*] I think it bothers him sometimes! The other day, when he was with the Princess and me in the pleasure-garden they are building [*she stops, abruptly, tapping her fingers to her lips with a pretty gesture*]—oh, dear, I'm doing it again, after all my promises——!

BATINAS. Doing what?

ZITYNE. [*With mock solemnity.*] Gossiping! And I promised her I wouldn't! And she's so sweet! I just love her! [*With a hasty glance up the street.*] Good-by! The road's clear for walking! That's what I came to find out!

BATINAS. [*Ingratiatingly.*] Stay——!

ZITYNE. No! I don't like you! You're awfully stilted! And conceited——! [*She runs off, right, a little way; then, as she sees the lash again descending, calls back to* DATHAN.] If you were a man, Dathan, you know what you'd do, don't you?

[*Before either can express himself, she is gone. For a moment there is silence. Then, eying his victim,* BATINAS *begins again.*

BATINAS. But you're not a man, are you? That's what nobody knows as well as your master! Why, I know it better than Pharaoh himself, for Pharaoh only gives the orders—*I* execute them! *I* see how you grovel under me, how you cringe every time I wave this above you [*brandishing the lash*]—you, with your talk of "Jehovah"! [*He continues cuttingly, not noticing* MOSES, *who, in the rich habit of an Egyptian prince, has just come in softly, right, and who stands unobserved, at rear.*] I

tell you if you prayed to the Nile—there's a god that comes across, but yours—pah!—a god of slaves!

DATHAN. [*Timidly, raising horror-stricken eyes.*] I beseech thee, master, do not blaspheme! Strike me if thou wilt, but blaspheme not! [*In a low voice.*] He is my God, a very present help in trouble!

BATINAS. [*Cracking his lash.*] As to that, we shall see——! [*With a cutting stroke.*] And in future, hold your tongue about "your God"! Do you understand? You belong to Pharaoh! You have nothing! Not a God—though indeed Pharaoh wouldn't take yours if you made him a present of Him! Not a wife, though there, I must say, [*slowly, licking his lips*] you have better taste, and——

DATHAN. [*Struggling to his feet and gazing at* BAT, *wild-eyed.*] What meanest thou—not a wife? [*As* BAT *only stares, sneeringly, at him, he repeats again, hoarsely.*] *Not a wife——?* [*Wildly, scanning the other's face.*] No, no! It cannot be true! Shelomith would not! She would not! [*Frantically, he flings himself on the ground.*] Tempt me not! I do not believe thee! Thou liest, to make me—to make me——

BATINAS. [*With swift anger.*] To make you what, you fool? [*With a contemptuous kick.*] *Revenge* yourself? No, no, you're too poor a thing for vengeance! [*Tickling his face with the lash.*] You know I'm not lying! You're just saying that because it lets you out! You'd be afraid to touch me! Zityne knew! You're all cowards! "Chosen people," indeed! [*Lashing him.*] Get up! I'm tired of this game! [*With another stroke, as he rises, moaning.*] I've given you all the time I can spare, and all the time Pharaoh can spare, from his pleasure-garden!

DATHAN. [*Brokenly, raising piteous hands to heaven.*] Oh, Thou—Thou—shall not my cry go up to Thee?

BATINAS. [*Falling on him savagely.*] Stop that, I tell you! And back to your work! You see—your God is dead!

MOSES. [*Springing forward at white heat.*] Now may God forgive thee, but I shall not forgive thee!

BATINAS. [*Dropping his lash and making deep obeisance.*] Pardon, my lord! I knew not——

MOSES. [*Cuttingly.*] No, thou didst not know! Thou

thoughtedst no man saw thee save this poor slave, whose wife thou hast defiled, whose God thou hast blasphemed!

BATINAS. [*In a low voice.*] Pardon, Prince Moses, it shall not occur again!

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] No, thou art right there!

DATHAN. [*Moaning on the ground.*] My wife—Shelomith—defiled by an Egyptian!

BATINAS. [*To* MOSES, *with a contemptuous glance at the slave.*] Truly, Prince Moses, I greatly regret, but these Jews make such a fuss about everything! A slave like that to hold things sacred——! *His* wife! *His* God! [*Uneasily, after a moment's pause, in which* MOSES *makes no response.*] Pardon, my lord, I'll get him back to his work now, for your pleasure-garden!

MOSES. [*Starting violently.*] *My* pleasure-garden! *Mine——?*

BATINAS. [*With assumed lightness.*] Why, surely yours, my lord! Yours or Pharaoh's! It will some day be the same thing, will it not?

MOSES. [*As if pondering it, half to himself.*] Mine—or Pharaoh's—the same thing!

BATINAS. [*Officiously.*] Why, yes, Prince Moses, everybody is talking about how you will succeed, the Princess Thermuthis having no child of her own!

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] 'Tis well, perchance, that they should talk! Men that talk much think little! [*Regarding him curiously.*] *Thou* talkest much, my Taskmaster of Egypt! Perchance thou thinkest I have forgotten!

BATINAS. [*With attempted nonchalance.*] Oh, no, indeed, my lord! Your memory is the talk of the whole University!

MOSES. [*With a sudden sigh.*] Yea, I remember much——!

BATINAS. [*After a quick glance, averting his eyes.*] Pardon, my lord, I fear my absence will inconvenience my colleagues! With your leave, I will take the slave back!

MOSES. [*Arresting him.*] Concern not thyself! I will take him back!

BATINAS. [*Starting.*] Pardon, Prince Moses, but I could not think of it! It is my duty! Pharaoh himself wills it!

MOSES. A moment ago thou saidst Pharaoh and I were the same!

BATINAS. [*Uneasily.*] Yea, my lord——?

MOSES. Well, then, I tell thee, *I* will attend to his return!

BATINAS. [*His perplexity turning to fear.*] But what shall I do, then?

MOSES. [*With intense bitterness.*] Art thou so soon weary of another's wife that her face is no longer beautiful in thine eyes?

BATINAS. [*Confused and trembling.*] My lord, I——

MOSES. Or of the profanation of another's God that further blasphemy affordeth thee no pleasure?

BATINAS. My lord, pardon! What do you wish me to do?

MOSES. [*Drawing his sword.*] Make thy peace——!

BATINAS. [*Falling to his knees.*] Mercy, Prince Moses! Mercy!

MOSES. [*Sternly.*] Pray to thy gods, not me!

BATINAS. [*Cringingly.*] I believe them not! [*Then, wildly, as if repenting his own blasphemy.*] Prince Moses—wait! My house is not prepared for me! My house among the Dead! Mercy! Mercy! Ah, most holy Nile, most holy Osiris, thou who sailest upon the waves at sunset—mercy!

DATHAN. [*Rising slowly as he sees the upraised sword.*] Lo—His promise!

MOSES. [*Plunging the blade in* BATINAS' *heart.*] I am more merciful to thee than thou to Pharaoh's slaves! [*Then, to* DATHAN, *as the body drops back.*] Now help me! Hasten!

DATHAN. [*Looking stupidly from* MOSES *to the body.*] Thou hast killed him!

MOSES. By the hand of God, I think! [*Then, with renewed urgency.*] Quick! Help me to bury him yonder in the sand!

DATHAN. I fear! [*He creeps closer to the body, and timidly touches the lash with his foot.*] His lash might follow me!

MOSES. [*Raising his head and by his example persuading* DATHAN *to assist him.*] Do not fear! Yonder——! [*With a gesture to the sand, left.*] Before any come——!

DATHAN. [*Curiously, dropping the body.*] Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?

MOSES. [*Repressing a start, quickly.*] Hush! It is no time for talk! Come——!

DATHAN. [*Slowly, preparing to obey.*] I know not what will come of this day's deeds! Thou art a prince, but for me, there is naught but trouble!

MOSES. [*As if daring him to deny it.*] I am thy brother——!

DATHAN. [*Dubiously, raising the body.*] Thou art from the Palace of Pharaoh the great King!

[*They disappear, left, and for a moment the stage is empty. Then, dressed as an important messenger,* EPIPHRAS, *the Egyptian, enters hurriedly from the right. He casts his eyes about, as if in search of some one.*

EPIPHRAS. [*Tentatively.*] Prince Moses——? [*Receiving no answer, and perceiving the bricks on the ground, he stands a moment, as in doubt, kicking them vaguely; then, a little louder.*] Prince Moses! [*At the sound of steps, rapidly approaching from the left, he stands at attention as* MOSES *enters, prostrating himself deeply before him.*] They told me thou hadst gone this way! A message from the Palace!

MOSES. [*Frowning a little.*] Say on!

EPIPHRAS. Pardon, Prince Moses, I was commanded to find thee with all speed!

MOSES. Well, I am here!

EPIPHRAS. [*Importantly.*] The enemies of my lord the King, those same Ethiopians of whom so much hath of late been spoken, are nearing the frontiers of Pharaoh, and he sends thee word to beseech of thee thine aid in their repulse! Here, my lord [*extending to* MOSES *a signet-ring*]—is the token!

MOSES. [*Coldly, taking the ring.*] Hath not Pharaoh many another to serve him?

EPIPHRAS. [*Surprised.*] My lord——?

MOSES. Hath not Pharaoh many generals? The Ethiopians are a brave people! Thinketh he not I am over-young to send against them?

EPIPHRAS. Nay, my lord, he desireth thee, and thee only! The Court hath heard much of thy valor before now, and here perchance Pharaoh deemeth thou wilt fight better than those others——!

MOSES. [*Abruptly.*] Why?

EPIPHRAS. Why, seeing that the battle is, as it were, for thine own crown!

MOSES. [*Frowning.*] I understand thee not!

EPIPHRAS. [*Controlling his annoyance.*] Pardon, Prince Moses, I thought myself very clear! I meant that thou best wilt over-

come these Ethiopians, seeing that thou and Pharaoh art all but the same in Kingship!

MOSES. Thou thinkest much! Say thou to Pharaoh——[*He turns away.*]

EPIPHRAS. [*Officiously.*] Yea, my lord, I hearken——!

MOSES. [*Abruptly.*] Hast thou a papyrus with thee, that I may read of this matter?

EPIPHRAS. [*Handing him a scroll.*] Pardon, my lord! I was in such haste to receive thine answer to Pharaoh that I all but forgot!

[*Almost violently,* MOSES *unfolds it and reads here and there, at random. Then, as if outdone, he presses it back into the other's startled hands.*

MOSES. I cannot go! Say thou to Pharaoh, I—I am not fit to go! [*Then, exasperated as* EPIPHRAS *stands staring at him.*] Dost thou not hear? Back to the Palace! I cannot go!

EPIPHRAS. [*Stammeringly.*] But—my lord—I——

[*He stops abruptly, as the* PRINCESS THERMUTHIS, *a lovely woman whose late thirties have but enhanced the delicate beauty of her youth, enters from the right, borne on a litter by Egyptian guards, and preceded by* ZITYNE.

EPIPHRAS. [*Bowing profoundly.*] The Princess——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Acknowledging the greeting of* MOSES *and* EPIPHRAS.] Prince Moses! And Epiphras! Well met! [*To* MOSES, *as* EPIPHRAS *draws near* ZITYNE, *in response to the invitation in her eyes.*] And doth he carry back to Pharaoh my father thy pledge to overcome the Ethiopians?

MOSES. [*In a low voice.*] Nay, Princess, I have but just told him, I [*slowly*]—I am not fit!

THERMUTHIS. [*Quickly.*] Nay, Moses, but thou doest thyself an injustice! [*Quickly, before he can interpose.*] Ah, 'twas ever thy wont, from the time thou wert a little child, to think others surpassed thee in beauty and wit and goodness of heart! How well I remember! But thou art wrong, Moses! Surely none is more fit than thyself for this difficult task!

MOSES. [*In a low voice.*] Oh, Princess, thou hast ever been so kind! It grieveth me to deny thee, but—I am not fit!

EPIPHRAS. [*Officiously stepping forward.*] My lord is deterred by his youth, Princess!

THERMUTHIS. [*Sharply.*] It is not that, Epiphras! Prince Moses is not too young! [*With an imperious gesture to the guards, she alights from the litter; then, to* EPIPHRAS.] Go, thou, return to the Palace, and tell Pharaoh my father that I myself will bear back the answer!

EPIPHRAS. [*Prostrating himself.*] As thou sayest, Princess! Farewell!

[*With a covert glance at* ZITYNE, *he goes out hurriedly, right.*

THERMUTHIS. [*To* ZITYNE.] And thou, Zityne, pray wait for me yonder [*with a gesture, right*], with the guards!

ZITYNE. And the new pleasure-garden, Princess? It is very wonderful and bright, and so restful, when you are tired, to watch the Hebrews work!

THERMUTHIS. [*With a smile.*] Another time, Zityne! We will not visit the pleasure-garden to-day!

[ZITYNE, *bowing deeply, withdraws right, followed by the guards with the litter.*

THERMUTHIS. [*Coming closer to* MOSES.] And now that we are alone, Moses, tell me thy thought upon this matter!

MOSES. [*As if putting something from him.*] They are hard thoughts, not easy to tell, Princess, and most uneasiest to thee!

THERMUTHIS. At least it was not what that presumptuous messenger of my father's but now suggested?

MOSES. Pardon, Princess, I did not note it!

THERMUTHIS. [*With hesitation.*] Thy youth——! He said thou wast deterred in going by thy youth! [*Between pleading and annoyance.*] Thou didst not say *that,* Moses?

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] Not that! My youth is not why I may not go against the Ethiopians!—Though in comparison with many of thy father's generals, I am young, Princess!

THERMUTHIS. In comparison with his generals, yea, perchance! But [*earnestly drawing closer*] thou art no longer a boy, Moses! Dost thou not realize that a man's world awaits thee?

MOSES. [*In a low voice.*] I have thought thereon to-day, Princess!

THERMUTHIS. Only to-day?

MOSES. Nay, not only to-day,—often! I think from the very

first, Princess! It was as if before I knew with my mind, my blood taught me! [*With gathering passion.*] Oh, Princess, thou couldst not guess the pain!—to look up from my cushioned seat beside Pharaoh and thyself, when we were driving hither and yon, and see them toiling in the field——! And to know it was no ordinary toil, but passing bitter! And to know it was not for themselves, but for the treasure cities of alien people! And, oh, Princess [*very low*], to know myself of them,—and yet a plaything in thy father's court——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Reproachfully.*] Moses! Of what speakest thou? Thou art no plaything! If thou didst know——

MOSES. Forgive me! [*Then, with a strong effort at self-command.*] I should not have spoken! There was something—nay, it is this which I may not tell thee!

THERMUTHIS. [*Sadly.*] Thou fearest to say what is in thy mind? And to me! Ah, Moses, have I been so little to thee, all the years, that thou fearest me now, at the end?

MOSES. [*Gently.*] Thou hast been so much, Princess! It is that which makes it hard!

THERMUTHIS. [*Regarding him with sudden hope.*] I have been much to thee? Is it true, I have been much?

MOSES. [*Reverently.*] My mother herself scarce more! But —thou art not my mother!

THERMUTHIS. [*Starting, then, with gathering passion.*] No, Moses! Though sometimes, I almost thought—thou thoughtedst it! Long ago, that first morning, when I bathed in Holy Nile, and thy little barque floated to me, and I caught thee close, thou wert my babe, then! I had none other! [*Half to herself, wistfully.*] I was naught but a young girl, desiring a child, as it were for play! Often our Egyptian maids are like that, desiring a play child,—before they know of love!

MOSES. More than once hath Miriam told me how kind thou wert!

THERMUTHIS. [*Swiftly.*] It was not kindness! Oh, Moses, Moses, surely thou seest that as I see it! Surely there is no need of words between us! I saved thee from the bulrushes for what thou shalt do!

MOSES. [*With repressed excitement.*] Thou feelest it, too, Princess,—this mission that I cannot understand, that draweth me?

THERMUTHIS. It is for the people's sake! That is why thou must first go into Ethiopia!

MOSES. For *my* people? Thou sayest that, Princess, thou, Pharaoh's daughter?

THERMUTHIS. [*Wistfully.*] Call me not "Pharaoh's daughter"! "Thermuthis"! Canst thou not say it, yet?

MOSES. [*Gently.*] Thermuthis——! It is beautiful, thy name, like thyself! [*With sudden passion, unconscious of her flush.*] Oh, why art thou not Queen? Then could such crimes not be?

THERMUTHIS. [*Softly.*] Perchance I shall be Queen one day! [*Rousing herself.*] But what crimes dost thou speak of?

MOSES. Must I then tell thee? Yea, perchance it is for the best! It is time I spake, and then indeed thou wilt comprehend why I cannot go into Ethiopia! These bricks [*with a passionate gesture*]—they are the grave-stones of my people!

THERMUTHIS. [*Paling.*] The grave-stones——? Of thy people——?

MOSES. [*Bitterly.*] Yea, verily! Designed of Pharaoh thy father to crush my brothers from the earth!

THERMUTHIS. [*Thoughtfully.*] Ah, it is *that* which troubles thee!

MOSES. [*As before.*] Yea, *that——!* Is it not enough? For he hath made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field! All their service wherein he hath made them serve hath been with rigor!

THERMUTHIS. Moses! Thou art angry! And yet have I done naught!

MOSES. [*Laughing harshly.*] Naught! When thou hast drawn the fangs of the only man that could succor them!

THERMUTHIS. [*Gently.*] But, Moses—it is not thy doing, the bondage! Nor canst thou undo it! Why concernest thou thyself with it?

MOSES. [*Starting.*] Of a truth—I know not! And yet—oh, that thou couldst understand——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Patiently.*] I have begged thee to speak plainly! Full well thou knowest I am not like Miriam thy sister, that I should understand parables, and my mind leap forward to the discovering of a dark matter!

MOSES. Nay, Princess, forgive me! I scarce know what I say!

[*Suddenly compassionate.*] Thou art more gentle than she, who sometimes seemeth scarce at all a woman! Yet in this which I have done, even she would quail! [*Whispering.*] Princess,—my hand is red!

THERMUTHIS. [*Solicitously.*] Some one provoked thee! Some one—from my father?

MOSES. Yea, Batinas, the cruel taskmaster great Pharaoh hath set over my brothers!

THERMUTHIS. Thou hast killed him?

MOSES. [*Bowing in assent.*] Because he was slowly killing and swiftly dishonoring my brother!

THERMUTHIS. [*Quickly.*] Doth any know?

MOSES. No one, I think, except the slave to whom these bricks pertain for thy pleasure-garden!

THERMUTHIS. [*Softly.*] I would thou wert not so bitter! I shall see he is not harmed! And, Moses, thou knowest it is not my will that the Hebrews should be so burdened! Thou knowest I never had power over my father, except that little, long ago, when he was young, to let me keep thee, as a babe!

MOSES. [*With a little smile.*] I know! And he hath hated me ever since my childish fingers tore the glittering crown from off his head! It was his foolish soothsayers who frightened him!

THERMUTHIS. [*With meaning.*] It was not only his soothsayers! 'Twas Miriam, thy sister! She made a song upon it, and sang it as a little maid, even in Pharaoh's presence! How she maddened him!

MOSES. [*Impatiently.*] She understood not what she sang! 'Tis often so! She should have been wed! Then would her heart grow quiet!

THERMUTHIS. [*Slowly.*] I know not! Marriage doth not always still the heart! There are dreams, Moses,—even upon the marriage bed! I think it would have been so with thy sister!

MOSES. At any rate, now thou understandest—I must flee before the thing is known!

THERMUTHIS. And whither, Moses?

MOSES. Anywhere—so that I may not hear my brothers! It was a rash deed I did, one that I cannot finish! I must away, for it is a bitter thing to hear their groaning, and have no power to help them!

THERMUTHIS. [*Watching him.*] Thou couldst have the power!

MOSES. No, no, I have naught! My sword against one man, yes! But what is one sword against ten thousand?

THERMUTHIS. In thy hand, as thou standest,—naught! But in thy hand, as thou returnest, leader of a mighty host—ten thousand swords!

MOSES. And now, Thermuthis, speakest thou thyself in riddles!

THERMUTHIS. [*Glowing.*] Nay, plain—that he who runs may read!

MOSES. [*Catching her excitement.*] Princess — not Ethiopia——?

THERMUTHIS. Yea, of a surety! Is not that the weapon to thy hand?

MOSES. But——

THERMUTHIS. Swift! Swift! Get thee gone! And all thine armor upon thee! Overcome these foes of our kingdom, and when thou returnest——

[*She stops, flushing and paling.*

MOSES. What then, Thermuthis?

THERMUTHIS. [*Very low.*] I shall be waiting—and Pharaoh my father grows old——!

MOSES. [*Too self-engrossed to read her.*] Thou wilt help me to help my brothers?

THERMUTHIS. [*Very wistfully.*] Yea, Moses, I will help thee —so much as thou wilt let me!

MOSES. [*Kissing her hands gratefully.*] Then I go——! Thou art kind, Princess!

THERMUTHIS. [*Passionately, drawing down his face to hers.*] Call me not *kind——!*

[*She breaks off at the sound of a light step, left, and starts violently away, as* MIRIAM *enters. She is a few years older than* MOSES, *but the tense absorption of her spirit, as in some secret purpose, gives her an effect of rapt agelessness, which the crowding years are powerless to dissipate. In the same austere way, she is beautiful, the dullness of her dress but heightening the effect of the scarlet chains and bracelets upon her body. Grasping the situation with a bare glance, with an outward humility which is somehow*

pride itself, she prostrates herself before THERMUTHIS, *who, trying not to show her keen annoyance, acknowledges the greeting.*

THERMUTHIS. Why, Miriam, what doest thou here, this time of day?

MOSES. [*With a smile that is half sad.*] *Thou* wert not going to the pleasure-garden to see them toil?

MIRIAM. [*Sombrely.*] Nay, I was not going to the pleasure-garden! I need not to hate Pharaoh any more! My hatred of Pharaoh is full and runneth over!

THERMUTHIS. [*Starting.*] What meanest thou?

MIRIAM. It is no matter!

MOSES. [*Persuasively.*] Nay, but, Sister——

MIRIAM. [*Intent eyes on both.*] I came to sing my song over the dead oppressor——!

THERMUTHIS. How knewest thou?

MOSES. [*Startled.*] Is it noised abroad?

MIRIAM. [*With faint scorn.*] Nay, brother! If it had been, I should scarce have noticed! [*Turning to* THERMUTHIS.] It is the things that are dark that to me are light, and hidden that to me are revealed! [*Then, simply.*] I heard his soul go by!

MOSES. [*With hasty authority.*] Such things cannot be!

THERMUTHIS. [*Strangely stirred.*] Was it dark, his soul, like himself? [*Then, hurriedly, putting the thought from her.*] Nay, Miriam, tell me not! [*Softly.*] Though one day I shall ask thee many things! Now I must make haste back to the Palace! [*As both stand silent.*] Art thou not coming, Moses?

MOSES. [*Hesitantly.*] With thy permission, Princess!

THERMUTHIS. [*Feeling herself watched by* MIRIAM.] And thou, Miriam—thou lookest strangely! There is something on thy mind——?

MIRIAM. [*After obeisance.*] Perchance, Princess Thermuthis! But what can it be to thee, that which is on the mind of a daughter of Israel?

MOSES. [*Reprovingly.*] The Princess cares much, Miriam! [*In a low voice, to* THERMUTHIS.] Wait but a moment for me, yonder [*with a gesture, right*], and I will join thee! She is overwrought—I must speak to her before I go!

THERMUTHIS. [*Reluctantly, feeling* MIRIAM'S *smouldering*

eyes.] Tarry not long! She is strange, thy sister! And remember thy promise, Moses!

[*She goes out, right, and* MIRIAM *and* MOSES, *rising from their prostration, survey one another, half distrustfully.*

MOSES. I have something to tell thee, Miriam!

MIRIAM. [*Indifferently.*] Thou needest not——!

MOSES. [*Controlling his annoyance.*] Nay, Sister, no man knoweth this! I do but newly know it myself!

MIRIAM. [*With her light scorn.*] If I waited for *thee* to know——! [*Cuttingly.*] So thou wilt marry her and rule Egypt, taskmasters and slaves together——!

MOSES. [*Starting violently.*] Art thou mad? Such a thought never came into my mind!

MIRIAM. [*Scornfully.*] Then thou art blind! [*Softly.*] Or cruel, Moses? Is it that?

MOSES. [*Restively.*] Always I have tried to be patient with thee, seeing it was thou saved me from the great waters, but——

MIRIAM. [*Passionately.*] Yea, and for what did I save thee? Would God I had let Nile cover thee before ever thou wert become one with Pharaoh!

MOSES. [*Trying to calm her.*] Art not thou ashamed, Miriam? Thou who but now didst guess—Jehovah knows how!—that I had killed an Egyptian!

MIRIAM. That was before she came!

MOSES. Nay, but, Miriam! Thou dost not understand——!

MIRIAM. [*Dubiously.*] She was in thine arms!

MOSES. [*Flushing.*] I was but making my promise to her!

MIRIAM. [*Bitterly.*] Of marriage—that is what I say! [*Tragically.*] Oh, Moses, dost thou not *remember——?*

MOSES. [*With angry explicitness.*] My promise to go forth against the Ethiopians! [*Quickly, seeing the horror in her face.*] Not for Pharaoh's glory——! Nay, Miriam, believe me, I beseech thee! But so that, in returning, I may be strong and can succor my brothers!

MIRIAM. [*Her arms dropping despairingly.*] And with *that* wouldst thou help them? With a sword grown red in Pharaoh's service? Nay, nay, but with thy red sword dipped in the blood of the oppressor [*seizing his sword and exultantly raising it above her head*]—to-day——! To-day——!

MOSES. [*Wresting it from her.*] Thou wilt hurt thyself! Thou, naught but a woman! Give it me!

MIRIAM. [*Flatly surrendering it, listening, as to something far off.*] Yea, perchance the sword is not the way! I know not! It is dark! [*Putting a detaining hand on his arm.*] But *thine* is not the way! Thou must not go into Ethiopia! A snare awaits thee! I can see it plain—a beautiful snare—but it will trap thy feet! Thou must not go! [*Stamping her foot.*] I say thou must not go! [*Scornfully, half to herself.*] Thou wouldst wed her, a stranger woman!

MOSES. Be quiet, Miriam! Thermuthis doth not wish to wed me! Her husband died long since, and she never thinks on love! [*As she tries to hold him.*] Let me go! She waits——! And wilt thou tell the slave to hold his peace? He waits about—these are his bricks!

MIRIAM. [*Sullenly.*] Yea, I will tell him!

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] There was that about him—— [*As if trying to put aside the impression.*] Nay, why should I think ill of him? Is not he, too, a child of Israel?

MIRIAM. Yea, Moses, but a child in bondage forgetteth oftentimes his father's house!

MOSES. [*With swift admiration.*] Oh, Miriam, *thou* art not as he! *Thou* couldst eat the bread of bondage a thousand years, and be free at the last!

MIRIAM. [*Quickly.*] I hope I shall not need——!

MOSES. Nay, Sister! [*Kissing her hurriedly.*] And now farewell! And say farewell to our father and mother and Aaron our brother!

MIRIAM. [*Her arms fast about him.*] Oh, Moses, have a care! I love thee—but thou hearkenest not!

MOSES. [*Simply.*] To thee, Miriam? Why should I? I hearken but to God!

MIRIAM. [*With swift passion.*] And may not God speak through a woman?

MOSES. [*Bluntly.*] No!

[*He is about to go, but as* MIRIAM *suddenly assumes an attitude of deep listening, as to something far off, her eyes fixed on something, though invisible, yet of passionate real-*

ity, he pauses; and, as she slowly begins to speak, he stands fascinated.

MIRIAM. [*As if the medium.*] Light——! Light——! Such as no man hath seen before——! Light——! It hurts mine eyes! I cannot look thereon! But my soul—ah, it pours into my thirsty soul like water sparkling from a brook! [*She pauses, then.*] But it is not like water! What is it like, then—this light somewhere, beyond? Light—and a voice speaking——! Whose voice? Not any *man's——!* And always through the light! What is the light? Lo—it burns——! It burns——! Fire——! Fire——! Yet that whereon it burns is consumed not! [*With heightening wonder.*] And about it a great peace! And then something—something—I cannot tell! A Will, speaking in the voice and the fire—a Will, and a people that is not forgotten! [*In passionate exultation.*] A people that is not forgotten of God!

[*There is a moment of tense silence, during which* MIRIAM *appears to move somewhat out of her trance-like state; but as* MOSES, *deeply impressed, takes a step toward her, with a whispered* "Miriam!" *she motions him to silence; then, in her natural voice, but with intense solemnity.*

MIRIAM. Take off thy shoes!

MOSES. [*Softly, obeying.*] Why, Sister?

MIRIAM. I do not know. [*After a moment, passing her hand wearily across her eyes.*] I think the place whereon thou standest was holy ground!

MOSES. [*Simply.*] I saw nothing! Nor heard I any voice but thine!

MIRIAM. [*With infinite wistfulness.*] But thou wilt see! And thou wilt hear! [*Very low, to herself.*] Though perchance I heard first!

MOSES. [*Wonderingly.*] How cometh it upon thee, Miriam? Thou art not like the soothsayers! Thou reapest no gains! Why doth it come upon thee?

MIRIAM. I cannot tell! It cometh sometimes in a great joy! And sometimes—yea, sometimes it cometh in a mighty fear! And always it is so great it overwhelmeth me, so that I may not properly make known what it was, and men will not heed me [*hopelessly*]—being but a woman!

MOSES. [*With hesitation.*] I would heed thee, if thou wert ever as—then! Thine eyes—ah, Miriam, thine eyes were as if they saw God!

MIRIAM. [*Very wearily.*] Was it so?

MOSES. [*Replacing his shoes, trying to throw it off.*] And now farewell! The Princess waits!

MIRIAM. [*Incredulously.*] Moses! Thou art not going into Ethiopia after—after that which I have seen?

MOSES. [*Turning pale.*] It concerned not *me*—thy vision?

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] Whom else?

MOSES. [*Half to himself.*] Her eyes—as if she were seeing God! She may be mad—but dare I disobey?

MIRIAM. [*As before.*] Thou canst not go into Ethiopia!

MOSES. I never wished it! But where, then, and what of my people?

MIRIAM. [*With decision.*] Go tell the Princess thou canst not go! Tell her thou art in grave danger! And then—thine own heart will tell thee! Flee away, and wait for that which I have seen! [*Suddenly she goes to him, and very tenderly puts her arms about him.*] Oh, Brother, canst thou not trust me, seeing it is but my love for thee and for that which thou shalt do, which maketh me to know these things?

MOSES. [*Looking into her eyes.*] Thou art sure, Miriam? I know that oft thou hast been right before, in little things, but this is so great a matter——!

MIRIAM. As great to me as thee!

MOSES. [*Troubled.*] It should not be so! Thou art a woman! Some one should wed thee! [*Half wonderingly.*] Thou art beautiful, Miriam—it is not yet too late!

MIRIAM. [*Drawing herself to her full height.*] Shall I bear a child, who would bear a people?

MOSES. [*Helplessly.*] I understand not——!

MIRIAM. [*Simply.*] Listen to me, Moses! Did not I guess of the Egyptian thou didst kill, without any bringing me the tidings?

MOSES. Yea, verily!

MIRIAM. And now almost meseems as if it were a greater than he whose downfall I came forth to sing! [*Under her breath.*] An oppressor greater than he! But the time is not yet! [*With quick imperiousness.*] Go, Brother, tell the Princess thou hast

great need to flee, that thou fearest thy crime will become known! She loves thee, and will send thee hence with all speed! Only tell her not whither thou goest!

MOSES. How can I when I know not myself? [*After a moment.*] My mind is blank save for the land of Midian!

MIRIAM. [*Starting.*] And why not Midian? Is Midian unvisited by God?

MOSES. [*Under his breath.*] How should I know? Never have I seen visions!

MIRIAM. [*With a tender smile.*] So thought Jacob, perchance, that night he laid him down with a stone for a pillow——!

MOSES. [*Dubiously.*] But I am not Jacob——!

MIRIAM. Nay, then [*with sudden pride*], thou art Moses! And perchance children shall one night gather round the candle to hear of thee, too! [*After a long look, pushing him gently from her.*] Farewell!

[*He goes out and* MIRIAM, *as if very tired, stands, head bent, by the bricks, waiting. In a few moments, satisfied that the time is ripe, she raises her head, and stands looking, left. Presently the Hebrew slave timidly reënters. He starts at sight of* MIRIAM.

MIRIAM. [*In low exultation.*] He is dead, thine oppressor!

DATHAN. [*Shivering.*] Batinas, the Egyptian? Yea, Prince Moses hath killed him!

MIRIAM. [*With amazement.*] Art thou not glad?

DATHAN. [*Cringingly.*] I fear——!

MIRIAM. Wherefore?

DATHAN. [*Gaspingly.*] Men might say 'twas *I* that killed him!

MIRIAM. And wouldst thou not be glad?

DATHAN. [*Turning from her in horror.*] Glad! Nay, Princess! Would there not be death for me, even as for him, in the yellow sands?

MIRIAM. [*Half to herself.*] And what is death? Is it not freedom from the oppressor?

DATHAN. [*Regarding her wonderingly.*] Nay, Princess, I know not!

MIRIAM. [*In a low voice.*] But *I* know! I know life is the shame, at the price of freedom! I know many things whereof I may not speak, lest they think me mad! I wonder is madness

but the gift of knowing? [*Then, on an abrupt transition.*] Hush, say nothing! No one will harm thee! [*Bending over him, as he begins to sob.*] I will tell the Princess Thermuthis! She will succor thee—she may even free thee, and then think of what thou canst do! She will be glad to aid thee—— [*Half fiercely to herself.*] It easeth the heart from the great wrong to do a little right! [*As he continues to sob.*] But thou art in trouble! Is it thy fear?

DATHAN. [*Desperately.*] Nay, Princess, my wife!

MIRIAM. [*Starting.*] Thou meanest——?

DATHAN. [*Hoarsely.*] Batinas, my master—he whom Prince Moses slew!

MIRIAM. [*Incredulously.*] And thou art not *glad* he slew him?

DATHAN. [*Wearily.*] I am glad of nothing! [*With sudden conviction.*] She may say *I* should have killed him,—Shelomith, my wife!

MIRIAM. Well——?

DATHAN. And what will my life be then,—with a woman that taunteth me for a coward?

MIRIAM. [*Swiftly.*] What hath thy life been ever, in the house of bondage?

DATHAN. [*Miserably.*] I was used thereto! Now—— Prince Moses hath shown me there is a path out!

MIRIAM. [*Passionately*]. Yea, the promise! The promise! Art thou not glad of the promise?

DATHAN. [*As before.*] I am glad of nothing! I fear! The bricks are many! [*He begins to gather them drearily.*] They are many, Princess, and they are hard to lift!

MIRIAM. [*Tragically, to herself.*] A slave with the soul of a slave! Oh, my people! My people!

[*For a moment she watches him. Then she swoops down upon him, and begins to aid him, piling the bricks together in feverish energy.*

MIRIAM. See! I help thee, I, thy sister, a daughter of Israel! [*As the slave surveys her, in open-mouthed astonishment.*] Look not so! True, I am but a woman! And God cannot speak through a woman! [*Bitterly.*] Said he not so, Moses, my brother? Said he not so? [*Then, exultantly.*] But he went not into Ethiopia! He went not! Though he stayed but for a dream, —a dream of a woman! [*Softly.*] And there it will come to

him—it will come to him face to face—the Promised Land! [*After a moment, heaping the bricks.*] And even now God can act through a woman! [*Passionately.*] Oh, thou slave! Thou slave! Art thou not a son of Israel, the firstborn of God? Canst thou not remember thy heritage? Canst thou not remember, thou who hast over thee the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob? [*Bursting into passionate tears, and rocking herself to and fro upon the ground.*] Am not I, Miriam, oppressed in thine oppression? [*Half brokenly, she helps him to his feet, laden with the bricks, then, with fresh strength.*] Go forth to thy labor! I will protect thee! Go forth to thy labor! But not for long! Not for long! And remember, in the day of the liberation, I, Miriam, have spoken it!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *Pharaoh's Throne-Chamber.*

TIME: *An afternoon, some twelve years later.*

The scene is the wide open space of the audience chamber, immediately before the throne itself, which is, at rise of curtain, divided from it by dark red curtains. There is little furniture about, except for a couple of seats, covered with the pelts of wild beasts. Tall palms are grouped about the pillars which support the roof. The brilliantly painted decorations upon the walls, however, preclude any impression of austerity which the room would otherwise convey. Instead, it is instinct with vivid, poisonous exuberance, and more tensely aware of the drama playing out about it than are the careless EGYPTIAN GUARDS, *lounging here in the burning sunlight.*

As the curtain rises, the argument which has swerved them from their game of dice is in full swing.

1ST GUARD. [*With brisk finality, flinging down his dice-cup.*] So there it is, and if you ask me, the sooner Pharaoh gets them out, the better!

2ND GUARD. [*Reprovingly.*] It's fortunate he *won't* ask you! Nice sort of ruler you'd make, giving in to every little whim of your subjects!

1ST GUARD. But these Jews *aren't* his subjects! That's what I keep telling you! And if he doesn't wake up to it in the audience this afternoon, there'll be the devil to pay!

2ND GUARD. Not necessarily! There's always the chance Aaron will lose his rod, or run out of tricks!

1ST GUARD. [*With a laugh.*] It's a pity Pharaoh can't steal it! But seriously, they're a separate people, and he's got no right to hold them!

2ND GUARD. [*Slapping the dice-cup across the mouth of the* 1ST GUARD.] Sh——! That's treason! And after all the harm they've done! If you do it again, I'll report you to Pharaoh——!

1ST GUARD. [*With lazy good-humor.*] Go ahead! But you needn't think he'll thank you! He's got quite enough on his mind these days, poor old man!—without any extra heresy-hunters! I tell you, he isn't through yet—just because we're having another of these respites!

2ND GUARD. [*Impatiently rattling the dice.*] Oh, well, let's go back to the game! Come now—what do you stake?

1ST GUARD. [*With sudden excitement.*] The whole game on Moses——!

2ND GUARD. [*Disgustedly flinging down the dice-cup.*] There you go again! I think he's got you bewitched! He or Aaron with that ridiculous rod! There's no playing with a man like you, but can't you at least *talk* about something else? The weather's delightful!

1ST GUARD. [*With a wry smile.*] So it is! And what an original topic! Anyhow, it's the one thing left they haven't made a mess of! [*Stretching himself lazily, and half reclining.*] Ooo! How good the sun feels on my legs! It's a mercy Mr. Aaron doesn't turn it into a cat!

2ND GUARD. [*With a horrified movement.*] Hush——! First treason—then blasphemy!

1ST GUARD. [*Smiling ruefully.*] Blasphemy! How about turning Holy Nile into blood!—But just let poor me mention a cat——! [*With an intimate gesture.*] By the way, did you know the Princess Thermuthis was so worked up over the whole affair, she forgot to go to Bubastis last week for the spring festival?

2ND GUARD. Of course I know it! Everybody's talking about it! Does that make it any better? Never since I have been in Pharaoh's court, have I seen such disrespect! And they say this year there were four sacred Kittens!

1ST GUARD. [*Thoughtfully.*] It's too bad! The Princess was always very fond of the festival at Bubastis!

2ND GUARD. [*Crossly.*] It's because of Moses! After all, she's only a woman, and any one can see how she feels! Though I certainly don't see why! Before he left, nothing but a dreamer, and——

1ST GUARD. [*Meditatively.*] The Jews run to dreamers! And in Egypt at that! Must be something in the climate! Remember the stories about Joseph?

2ND GUARD. Oh, well, he was different! It never affected Joseph the way it's affected this Moses—running up and down the city, stirring up the lowest of the slaves——! Some of them don't thank him, either!

1ST GUARD. He thinks he's their leader!

2ND GUARD. [*Scornfully.*] Well, nobody else wants them! But the Princess to be in love with him—that's what I can't understand——!

1ST GUARD. My dear fellow, in love all women are the same! You never can see the reason! Though in this case, the poor lady should have known what to expect when he refused to go into Ethiopia!

2ND GUARD. [*Haughtily.*] Osiris be praised such a marriage never transpired! Such ingratitude! The Princess Thermuthis is a thousand times too good for him!

1ST GUARD. [*With a laugh.*] She's a thousand times too old for him!

[*Before his shocked companion can frame an adequate reply, the portal at right opens, and* EPIPHRAS, *much the same as in* ACT I, *enters. Seeing the court empty save for the two guards, he haughtily, though eagerly, approaches them.*]

EPIPHRAS. [*Greeting them, not without noting the dice-cups.*] Well! Haven't you two got anything better to do this afternoon than gamble?

2ND GUARD. [*Haughtily.*] We are not gambling! We guard the throne-chamber of great Pharaoh!

EPIPHRAS. [*Scoffingly.*] Locking the door, after the horse is out of the stable! You ought to be dismissed! It's disgraceful—the way you let those locusts all over the palace!

2ND GUARD. [*With dignity.*] I was home on sick-leave! It was my wife, really——!

1ST GUARD. You never told me!

EPIPHRAS. [*With assumed indifference.*] What was the matter with her?

2ND GUARD. Hysterics!—One doesn't care to speak of such things! [*Then, half reluctantly.*] She—she's never been the same woman since the day the frogs got into her kneading-trough!

1ST GUARD. Well, exactly! And yet you don't want Pharaoh to let them go!

EPIPHRAS. Why did you let her bake? You knew how Moses had threatened!

2ND GUARD. I told her not to! But it was the birthday of our eldest! She set her heart on making him a seed-cake!

1ST GUARD. Humph! You should have told her it would be a frog-cake!

2ND GUARD. We both thought it was all imagination——!

EPIPHRAS. [*Hastily.*] Well, of course it *is,* when it comes to that——!

2ND GUARD. Yes! [*Then, shudderingly.*] She makes me get up at night to throw them out of the bed!

1ST GUARD. [*Quizzically.*] And then I expect *you* get to feeling them, too!

2ND GUARD. [*Irritably.*] Maybe I do! And maybe that's why I'd like to talk about something else! [*To* EPIPHRAS.] What are you wandering about for?

EPIPHRAS. [*Importantly, coming to a halt.*] I'm not wandering about! I am waiting to carry a message for the Princess Thermuthis!

1ST GUARD. [*Glancing left.*] I hear steps! [*Fussily adjusting his mantle.*] I shouldn't wonder if it wasn't that pretty little maid of hers!

[*The portal left swings wide, and* ZITYNE, *gayly dressed, enters self-importantly. Seeing the three men all devouring her with their eyes, she smiles flirtatiously at the* 1ST GUARD, *all but ignores the second, and goes to* EPIPHRAS.

EPIPHRAS. [*Greeting her with heavy ardor.*] Zityne——!

ZITYNE. [*With a good deal of manner.*] I'm so glad you're here, Epiphras! It makes me frightfully nervous, waiting about nowadays!

1ST GUARD. [*Before* EPIPHRAS *can respond.*] You may be nervous, Miss Zityne! But do you know, you're the first person I've seen that the plagues are becoming to!

ZITYNE. Sh——! Don't be silly! I look a perfect ghost—I've been through such a lot! Eight whole plagues—just fancy it!

2ND GUARD. [*Under his breath.*] Osiris grant they are over!

EPIPHRAS. [*Drawing her aside.*] I want to talk to you, Zityne!

These are no times for a young girl to go about unprotected! Now, you're getting pretty good compensation from the Princess, aren't you? [*Then, as he reads a rather flippant surprise in her eyes.*] Never mind—don't answer yet! How can we get those fellows out?

ZITYNE. [*Regarding the* 1ST GUARD *out of the tail of her pretty eyes.*] Oh, they aren't paying any attention to us! Speak perfectly freely, Epiphras, just as if they weren't here! Yes, my pay's all right! Isn't yours?

EPIPHRAS. [*In sudden embarrassment.*] Um——

2ND GUARD. [*Lounging up to them.*] Pardon! But I understood you to say you were carrying a message for the Princess!

EPIPHRAS. [*Haughtily, turning his back.*] So I am!

1ST GUARD. [*Ingratiatingly.*] You, too, Miss Zityne?

ZITYNE. [*With sudden mischief.*] Yes, I've got the message for Epiphras! And it's perfectly idiotic! [*She turns to* EPIPHRAS.] She wants you to bring his sister here before audience with Pharaoh!

EPIPHRAS. [*Turning pale.*] Whose sister? Not Moses'——?

ZITYNE. [*Clapping her hands.*] Yes, Miriam! Isn't it *too* lovely? And for *you*—when you're so terribly afraid of her! Oh, don't say you aren't! I know you are! Why, most everybody is, except the Princess!

1ST GUARD. [*Curiously.*] Does the Princess like Miriam?

ZITYNE. [*The men grouped about her, eager for gossip.*] Of course she can't *like* her! But ever since the plagues began there's been a queer kind of fascination! You know—like in danger!

2ND GUARD. [*Hastily.*] I never felt the slightest fascination in danger!

EPIPHRAS. Nor I——!

ZITYNE. [*Pointedly.*] No, some people don't!

1ST GUARD. [*Boldly.*] *I* feel it, Zityne! That's what attracted me to *you!*

ZITYNE. [*Tapping his cheek.*] Hush! Aren't things too serious to be silly?

1ST GUARD. [*As before.*] They're *so* serious, you've *got* to be silly! There's nothing else left! You know the old proverb—"Let us eat, drink and make love, for to-morrow we——"

ZITYNE. [*Stifling a scream, her hands to her pretty ears.*] No! No! Don't say that word! It makes me afraid! [*Beginning to cry, as they look at her in sudden alarm.*] Now you've spoiled it all! That word you said——

1ST GUARD. I didn't *say* it!

ZITYNE. But you *thought* it! [*Gazing about her fearfully.*] We all thought it! Didn't we? [*Then, peremptorily to* EPIPHRAS.] Hurry up! Get Miriam here!

EPIPHRAS. [*Grumblingly.*] I don't see why it should be me all the time! I should think somebody else could go to their old house!

1ST GUARD. I'll go! I'd be glad to get a glimpse of Zipporah!

ZITYNE. [*Smiling, in restored confidence.*] You won't, necessarily, you know! They say she goes gadding about as soon as Moses is out of the house!

1ST GUARD. It looks as if he'd made a mistake there, whatever else he got out of Midian.

2ND GUARD. For my part, I think she shows sense in not being like the other Jewish women!

ZITYNE. Miriam doesn't think so! They say she's very scornful of Zipporah because she wants Moses to give up all this plague business and settle down! They even hint [*dropping her voice, as they crowd about her*]—she'll try to do something terrible if she ever has the chance——!

EPIPHRAS. [*Incredulously.*] I don't believe it! Whom could she get to help her?

1ST GUARD. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, there's always some one for that sort of thing! That fellow Dathan, for instance—that Moses killed the Taskmaster for, a long way back! They say he's looking for trouble!

2ND GUARD. But why? He was never blamed! Why, I thought he even got his freedom!

1ST GUARD. Yes, through the Princess——! She's so soft——

ZITYNE. [*Loyally.*] She's so sweet!

1ST GUARD. Some trouble about his wife—I never understood——

ZITYNE. [*Suppressing a yawn.*] Well, anyway, I'd simply love to see if Moses' wife is there! [*Turning to the* 1ST GUARD.] I think I'll just go along with you——!

EPIPHRAS. [*Pompously.*] Zityne! I am surprised! It is *I* who am commanded to, and however foolish——

[*He stops, confused, as the portal, right, swings open, and* THERMUTHIS *herself, very pale, in long, trailing gray garments, enters. Reading at a glance the flushed faces of all four, she seems nevertheless too depressed for expostulation, but, returning their profound bows briefly, goes to* EPIPHRAS.

THERMUTHIS. [*Wearily seating herself.*] What said Miriam?

EPIPHRAS. [*Very embarrassed.*] Pardon, most noble Princess! I—I have not yet been——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Wearily to* ZITYNE.] Thou hast been chattering again! A parrot had been as useful!

ZITYNE. [*Sniffling.*] Pardon, Princess! Of a truth, it is the first day in a week I have felt like saying a word! It's *such* a relief to have those awful plagues over!

THERMUTHIS. [*Starting.*] Over? And who sayeth they are over? Hath not there been other respites? And was it not ever more terrible thereafter? [*With weary impatience to* EPIPHRAS.] Go! Fetch hither Miriam the sister of Moses! Say I would speak with her before the audience! [*As he bows, and goes out, left.*] And hasten!

ZITYNE. [*Hovering about.*] Pardon, Princess, but is it true she hath the gift of divination?

THERMUTHIS. How should I know? Perchance is there no such gift!

1ST GUARD. [*Eagerly, bowing low.*] Pardon, Princess, but is it not the talk of the court that Miriam went throughout the city the night before they turned Holy Nile into blood, prophesying the same?

THERMUTHIS. [*Haughtily, suppressing a shiver.*] So I have heard, but I know not!

2ND GUARD. [*Timidly, bowing low.*] Pardon, most noble Princess, but if she knew that, might she not know if we were through now?

ZITYNE. [*Softly, trying to quiet him.*] Hush! Trouble not the Princess!

THERMUTHIS. They trouble me no more than thou, Zityne!

[*Turning to the* 2ND GUARD.] I cannot answer thy question. [*As if to herself.*] I know only I know nothing!

[*Hushed in spite of themselves by her drooping figure and tragic face, they retire left, and* ZITYNE *softly unfurls the fan of* THERMUTHIS, *and moves it to and fro before her face. After a moment.*

THERMUTHIS. [*In a far-away voice.*] I have no need thereof, Zityne!

ZITYNE. [*Stopping mechanically.*] Of the fan, Princess? Pardon, it is so hot here in the sunlight, I thought it would cool thee!

THERMUTHIS. I am not warm! Indeed, I have been cold from noon on!

ZITYNE. [*Wonderingly, putting away the fan.*] And yet the sun is hot, praised be Osiris!

THERMUTHIS. [*Regarding the patch of sunlight at her feet.*] It would be strange, Zityne, would it not, if the sun should one day darken?

ZITYNE. Nay, but, Princess, the setting of the sun is a beautiful thing!

THERMUTHIS. I mean not in its setting,—and not in a great storm. But suddenly—suddenly—as it were, now! And thereafter should shine no more forever!

ZITYNE. [*With a shiver.*] I pray thee, Princess, speak not of such things! Praised be Osiris the sun is very bright! [*Stretching out her bare arm to the shaft of light.*] And warm, Princess, warm and beautiful!

THERMUTHIS. [*Stifling a sigh.*] Yea, the sun is beautiful! [*Softly.*] So was Holy Nile before it was dark——!

[*Before* ZITYNE *can reply, the portal, left, opens abruptly, and* EPIPHRAS *enters. Saluting* THERMUTHIS, *he holds wide the portal as* MIRIAM *comes in. Her manner is one of tense expectation, threatened on the one hand in the deeds already accomplished and on the other by a scorn which holds them as nothing, in comparison with that which she knows must follow. Her beauty is deeply glowing, burning through the simple attire of the Hebrew woman she is now wearing. She has aged very little.*

EPIPHRAS. The Princess Miriam!

MIRIAM. [*Flashing him a dark glance.*] I am Miriam! Understandest thou? I accept no Egyptian title!

THERMUTHIS. [*Going toward her.*] My messenger will remember! [*To* EPIPHRAS.] And now thou canst go! Thou and the rest! [*As all four reluctantly withdraw, the three men though trying to preserve their dignity all surreptitiously striving to be nearest* ZITYNE, THERMUTHIS *beckons* MIRIAM *to a seat beside her.*] I thank thee for coming, Miriam! Even to my impatience thou hast been swift!

MIRIAM. [*Simply.*] I was nigh at hand! I knew thou wouldst want me!

THERMUTHIS. [*In a low voice.*] Thou art kind! More kind than thy brother—though it used not so to be!

MIRIAM. Nor is it now! He hath been about the city since day-break and he hath much to speak upon with Aaron, before the audience,—and with Zipporah his wife!

THERMUTHIS. I have never seen Zipporah since that first day he brought her home. She is beautiful, but——

MIRIAM. [*On guard.*] What is it, Princess?

THERMUTHIS. [*With hesitation.*] Doth she resemble thee, Miriam, in her hatred of the Egyptians?

MIRIAM. [*With suppressed bitterness.*] Nay, Princess, I think she resembleth me in nothing!

THERMUTHIS. [*With restrained eagerness.*] She loveth Egypt, then? She would be content to dwell here?

MIRIAM. [*Vehemently.*] Why askest thou me such things? Is it for me, an Hebrew, to tell thee, Pharaoh's daughter, of the shame of my house?

THERMUTHIS. [*Pleadingly.*] I had heard they—they thought not alike in all things—and I but thought that if to-day I might persuade Pharaoh my father to lighten the burdens, oh, much, much, Miriam—to lighten them indeed until they be scarce burdens at all!—all might yet be well—if—if—— [*In a low voice.*] Moses' wife Zipporah would but persuade him to give over this terrible affliction of the land of Egypt!

MIRIAM. [*Sternly.*] And what of us? What of the children of Israel?

THERMUTHIS. [*Weakly.*] If it were not for the burdens, could not they worship their God here?

MIRIAM. [*Rising in incredulous anger.*] In Egypt? Beneath Pharaoh? And thou callest me, Miriam, hither, to ask me such questions? [*Putting off the clinging hands of* THERMUTHIS.] Nay, nay, I go! Thou canst order me flogged! Thou canst order me stoned! Thou canst throw my body to that holy river of thine which my brother turned to blood, and wherein the dead frogs stank! But thou canst not mock me with questions which are burning insults!

THERMUTHIS. [*Suddenly drooping, in a low voice.*] Forgive me, Miriam! I called thee not for this!

MIRIAM. [*Sullenly, arrested by the change of manner.*] For what, then?

THERMUTHIS. [*Very wistfully.*] To ask of thee, what is beyond?

MIRIAM. [*Returning slowly to her seat.*] Beyond! What meanest thou?

THERMUTHIS. Thou knowest what I mean!

MIRIAM. In death? [*As* THERMUTHIS *nods silently.*] And thou, an Egyptian, askest this of me, Miriam!

THERMUTHIS. Thou art a woman, even as I! And thou knowest more than I! Oh, thou mayest think it strange, Miriam, but ever I could have been thy friend, hadst thou not been so set upon this destiny of thy people! Truly, I think friendship hath naught to do with nations! It was naught to me, thy birth, but thou hadst never the time to look beyond my birth to me!

MIRIAM. [*Tragically.*] I see ever my people—in the house of bondage!

THERMUTHIS. [*Softly.*] And thyself, leading them into the Promised Land!

MIRIAM. [*Under her breath.*] Nay, I shall not lead them! I am naught but a woman! Moses will lead them!

THERMUTHIS. Yea, for he is strong and young! He seemeth ever to wax stronger since he kept those flocks in Midian! And he hath cast a spell upon the land—oh, I know! And unless Pharaoh my father will relent—and I think he will not—after the audience this day there will be more grievous trouble!

MIRIAM. [*In low exultation.*] And then will he lead them out —my people, with a strong hand!

THERMUTHIS. And if he lead them, art thou so sure it will be

into that Promised Land whereof he hath spoken to Pharaoh? Oh, it may flow with milk and honey, as he saith, but hast thou truly thought thereon, Miriam, if a man can lead men into the Promised Land?

MIRIAM. [*Regarding her curiously.*] Why, what meanest thou?

THERMUTHIS. I scarce know! It hath come to me so strangely! It came as it were in the brightness of the sun, which brought—I know not how—a cloud, and a cold shadow—and the thought of death! *Thou* shouldest know these things, Miriam!

MIRIAM. I know them sometimes, Princess, but not to-day! No, not to-day! To-day I am glad! I think perchance I have never been glad before,—save when my brother killed our oppressor! That was a great deed, but there will come a greater! [*Suddenly, quite gently, she looks at* THERMUTHIS.] I think perchance I pity thee, thou almost a Queen, who hath ever been so mighty, she could never know the joy of being raised up!

THERMUTHIS. A Queen is not mighty! After all, thou art but a child! I thought thee older! With that new knowledge I have to-day, a Queen seemeth so slight a thing, guarded all her life on all the little paths to go forth at the last upon the great path—alone!

MIRIAM. [*Softly.*] Perchance it *is* more lonely for a Queen to die!

THERMUTHIS. I did not go to the festival at Bubastis! Heardest thou? And but to-day a messenger did bring me word that the sacred Kitten hath died! [*Showing a jewel to* MIRIAM.] See? This is her image! It was an ill omen! It was her to whom I would have prayed in all this! And now she is dead, and the messenger, meseemed, looked askance at me, as if it were I had wrought the deed by not sacrificing unto her! And though I know I did not, yet there is a feeling as of lead upon my heart because I know that even had she lived, she could have availed me naught!

[*As if half surprised at herself,* MIRIAM *leans swiftly forward and with a murmured "I pity thee!" kisses* THERMUTHIS *upon the forehead; but as the Princess, in quick gratitude, is about to draw her closer, there is a step, left, and the two women draw apart, tensely conscious of their difference as* MOSES *enters. Since the preceding act he has aged more*

than MIRIAM, *though less than* THERMUTHIS, *and, dressed no longer as an Egyptian, but as a Hebrew, carries himself with the assured manner of a leader. Though assured, however, he is in no sense personally aggressive, but rather as if calmly dependent upon an unfailing strength other than his own. Except to the effeminate standards of Pharaoh, he is handsome, at once virile and gentle. He looks surprised and somewhat annoyed at the sight of* MIRIAM, *but as* THERMUTHIS *rises, he seems to forget his sister, as, flushing deeply, he salutes the Princess.*

THERMUTHIS. [*Gently.*] I did not think to see thee before the audience!

MOSES. [*Embarrassed.*] It is almost time therefor! And I desired to see thee first, if thou wilt pardon the presumption!

THERMUTHIS. [*Quietly.*] There is no cause for pardon!

MOSES. [*With effort.*] Yea, Princess, there is much cause! When I consider what thou didst do for me as a babe, and what I do now unto thy land——! But it hath been laid upon me!

THERMUTHIS. [*With tragic self-realization.*] I am but a stone that is in thy path, that must be flung away! A bramble that must be uprooted!

MOSES. Nay, Princess, I beseech thee! Never have I thought on thee as such things!

THERMUTHIS. I know, Moses! Perchance to a man with so great a mission as thyself, is there no time at all for thought upon such as I! I served a purpose once. To-day, thou only knowest me as a part of that hated race from which thou and thy people would be gone!

MOSES. [*Suddenly stern.*] Yea, and they are a hated race! And bitter burdens have they laid upon my people! Yea, and for thrice a lifetime hath the bondage been passing bitter, such as turned the heart to water, and the bread to ashes. It is time I led my people forth!

THERMUTHIS. I know it for a truth! [*Suddenly turning away and breaking into dry sobs.*] But, oh, Moses, Moses, it was not of me, the bondage! It was not of me!

MOSES. [*Austerely.*] It was of thy fathers! And ours is a jealous God, a God that remembereth! Yea, I think it is thy fathers' sins visited upon thee!

THERMUTHIS. [*Wonderingly.*] And that is thy God! And my gods, what are they? Ever since thine turned Holy Nile to blood, I have doubted mine. And yet I would not thy God! He is powerful, but he is cruel! [*Suddenly struck by a thought.*] Oh, Moses, how knowest thou if he be indeed God?

MOSES. [*Raptly.*] I have heard His Voice!

THERMUTHIS. [*Very wistfully.*] I would there were somewhere a God of Love!

MOSES. That were blasphemy, Princess! [*Softening, as he takes her hand.*] Yet I pray thee to forgive me for what I must do! [*As her hands drop wearily, he turns abruptly away.*] Miriam!

MIRIAM. [*Coming forward.*] What wouldst thou?

MOSES. I did not know where thou hadst gone!

MIRIAM. The Princess desired me!

MOSES. It is well. [*In a low voice.*] She hath been ever kind to me, and I do pity her now,—though perchance I should not! But now return, I pray thee, unto Zipporah, and show her what lieth before us!

MIRIAM. [*Incredulously.*] To Zipporah? To thy wife? Thou wouldst have me away from the audience?

MOSES. [*With some impatience.*] I shall be there—and Aaron! And thou canst guess what will befall!

MIRIAM. [*Exultantly.*] Yea,—I can guess! But I would be there to *see!*

MOSES. But, Miriam, if thou canst guess—and Aaron and I will tell thee thereafter——! [*Trying another tack.*] Thou art but a woman—thou canst do naught with Pharaoh, and perchance thou canst with Zipporah! [*Pleadingly.*] Thou knowest I am much troubled!

MIRIAM. [*Bitterly.*] And well hast thou cause! Thou that didst take to wife a stranger woman!

MOSES. I knew not it was a fault! Thou didst tell me to beware a snare in Ethiopia—thou saidst naught upon the women of the land of Midian——!

MIRIAM. I knew that a vision awaited thee—a vision and a cause! How could I tell thou wouldst see first a woman! Thou that seemedst like none of the others!

MOSES. [*Restlessly.*] Yet I pray thee, Miriam, go to her! I

have marked she liketh well to hearken unto thy voice in the spells!

MIRIAM. [*Scornfully, though watching him closely.*] Because she hopeth I will tell her of the shepherd-youths by the fountain in her land, and of how they sigh now that she is thy wife!

MOSES. [*Patiently.*] Nay, Miriam, I think she pineth for her father and his flocks!

MIRIAM. [*Flashing him a swift smile.*] I was but trying thee! At least thou art not jealous!

MOSES. Nay, I am not jealous! Perchance Zipporah would like me better if I were!

MIRIAM. So thou knowest that! [*With sudden violence.*] Oh, Brother, how couldst thou wed her who loveth the fleshpots of Egypt more than the freedom of a people? [*Before he can reply,* ZITYNE, EPIPHRAS *and the guards reënter, right, saluting the Princess and, very differently,* MOSES *and* MIRIAM, ZITYNE *taking her place by the Princess.*]

MOSES. It is time! I beseech thee to go! [*Without a word,* MIRIAM *turns from him, and, with a salutation to* THERMUTHIS, *and a murmured "Farewell, Princess!" goes out, left.*]

ZITYNE. [*Timidly, to the Princess.*] Pardon, Princess——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Abstractedly.*] What wouldst thou?

ZITYNE. I am afraid to speak to him, but——

THERMUTHIS. [*Annoyed.*] Of what and of whom speakest thou, Zityne?

ZITYNE. [*With a gesture toward* MOSES.] Of his wife, Zipporah——! [*As* THERMUTHIS *starts.*] She is outside!

THERMUTHIS. [*To* MOSES, *with an effort.*] Thy wife, Moses, would speak with thee!

MOSES. [*Starting violently.*] My wife——? Here——!

[*He strides to the door, right, and opens it, disclosing* ZIPPORAH, *a voluptuously beautiful and discontented woman.*

MOSES. [*Incredulously.*] It is thou!

ZIPPORAH. [*Composedly.*] Yea, I——!

MOSES. [*With an effort to ignore the prying eyes of the attendants.*] But, Zipporah——! Our children are not sick?

ZIPPORAH. [*As before.*] No one is sick! Or rather [*her voice rising*], no one but I!

MOSES. [*Surprised.*] Thou art sick, Zipporah? Then surely thy couch——

ZIPPORAH. Hearken, Moses! I am sick with loneliness! And terror—lest Pharaoh do thee an injury, and——

MOSES. [*Hurriedly, seeing the guards preparing to draw back the curtains about the throne.*] Miriam hath gone to sit with thee! [*Pushing her gently toward the door, left.*] She waits!

ZIPPORAH. [*Miserably.*] I have no need of thy sister Miriam! I——

MOSES. [*With sudden sternness.*] I pray thee—go!

[*She goes out reluctantly, and a moment later the curtains are drawn back, revealing, on a raised dais, the scarlet throne of* PHARAOH. *It is empty, but as the guards, ordered "Take your places!" by* EPIPHRAS, *start slowly forward, one on either side of the pillars beneath the dais, and the Princess, attended by* ZITYNE, *mounts toward the seat at the right of the throne,* PHARAOH *himself, an old man, handsome and sinister and dressed in utmost pomp, attended by guards and courtiers, majestically enters from a door at the left of the dais, and takes his seat upon the throne. Soothsayers, magicians, ladies of the court, and musicians, stream in about him, the brilliant clothes of the women and of* PHARAOH *himself contrasting with the dark robes of the magicians and soothsayers and with those of the* PRINCESS THERMUTHIS, *who now, attended by* ZITYNE, *takes her place at the right of the throne. As* PHARAOH'S *eyes catch sight of* MOSES, *who, throughout the ceremony, has stood in proud isolation where* MIRIAM *has left him, his eyes turned toward the court, but preoccupied and grave,* PHARAOH *beckons* EPIPHRAS *to his side.*

PHARAOH. Say we are ready!

EPIPHRAS. [*Prostrating himself, in a loud voice.*] Great Pharaoh is ready!

[*There is a long movement of deep and prolonged prostration on the part of all but* MOSES, *who, barely inclining his head, stands silently waiting.*

PHARAOH. [*Insolently.*] Who is that fellow?

EPIPHRAS. [*Confused.*] Why, that, sire—that is Moses!

PHARAOH. [*Still as if* MOSES *could not hear him.*] Ah, yes—Moses! [*Turning sarcastically to* THERMUTHIS.] His respect to us showeth well that tutelage of thine!

THERMUTHIS. [*With dignity, in the general titter.*] Moses hath passed beyond my tutelage!

PHARAOH. [*Coldly.*] So it would seem! And it had been well if thou, foreseeing this, hadst kept the laws of thy land! [*With mounting anger.*] Holy Nile had been a very proper burying-place for him who would later defile it!

THERMUTHIS. [*Looking him in the face.*] I did not know, my lord, that thou believedst Moses *had* defiled Holy Nile! I thought thou saidst 'twas all a trick, and without substance of truth?

PHARAOH. [*Annoyed.*] And so it was! Did not our magicians do as much? [*Turning to the Chief Magicians, threateningly.*] Answer me! Did ye not?

1ST MAGICIAN. [*Old and trembling.*] Pardon, great Pharaoh! I deemed that we had, until of late—in my great sickness of the grievous boils, I deemed perchance——

PHARAOH. [*Curtly interposing.*] Enough! We have no time to bandy words in this contentious spirit! The plagues—or such fancied appearance of them as hath beguiled the imaginations of our older and weaker subjects—are over! We understood Moses craved audience with us, and though we see naught further to be said, yet in our clemency, being a most gracious sovereign, and one ever attentive to the slight whim even of a race of slaves—such as these Jews—we have granted it! If perchance the eyes of Moses are affected by the brightness of our holy sun, so that in his bright beams he discerned us not, nor made obeisance, yet if he be recovered now, and can make the same, we will hear him, though we have no idea for what he cometh thither!

MOSES. [*From where he stands.*] Thou art wrong, great Pharaoh! Mine eyes are affected not by the brightness of the Egyptian sunlight! For truly, oh, King, thy sun at his highest seemeth but dim before that Light whereon I gazed in Midian!

PHARAOH. Our sunlight dim? Nay, then, thine eyes are sick indeed if so it seemeth to thee, and perchance their best physician would be the darkness of a dungeon-cell!

MOSES. [*With dignity.*] I have not said thy sun was dim, great

Pharaoh! I say that by the brightness of the glory of the Burning Bush——

PHARAOH. Silence! I have heard enough of that vision of thine! I daresay the chief of my Magicians could do as much for me any day! [*Turning to the* CHIEF MAGICIAN.] Speak! Is it not so? Canst not thou make me to see our Gods?

1ST MAGICIAN. [*Tremblingly.*] Pardon, most holy Pharaoh! I scarce know—I have been very sick!

PHARAOH. [*Impatiently.*] I have no time to hear thereon! [*Aside to his courtiers.*] He is too old! Look how his hands tremble! I must get me young men from beyond Rameses! [*To* MOSES.] Well? We cannot wait all day! Perchance thou speakest so much with slaves that thou forgettest to whom thou speakest now—that we are Pharaoh, the great king!

MOSES. I remember——!

PHARAOH. [*Sternly.*] The place to remember is upon thy knees, thy face bowed to the earth!

MOSES. Thou askest, great Pharaoh, that which is beyond my power to give thee!

PHARAOH. What is this? Thou, brought up as a prince, in our court? Thou canst not show us this much of homage?

MOSES. [*With fine scorn.*] After that which hath passed between us, Pharaoh, after that which by the hand of the Lord our God, we have brought upon the land of Egypt, after the fiery hail, and the murrain and the frogs, after the locusts and the thick flies and the boils, after the lice upon thy sacred beasts, and after the turning of thy holy river into blood, wouldst thou indeed the lying homage of a bended knee?

PHARAOH. [*Biting his lip.*] Come hither!

MOSES. If it please thee, not without Aaron my brother!

PHARAOH. Where is he?

MOSES. [*Pointing to the left portal.*] He waits without. He wished not to disturb his mind with any talk until thou shouldst summon us before thee!

PHARAOH. [*Sarcastically.*] He is grown of much importance since his conjuring tricks! [*To* EPIPHRAS.] Go fetch Aaron!

[EPIPHRAS *bows and, going down, flings open the portal, ushering in* AARON, *a man older and more impressively dressed than* MOSES, *carrying a rod and who, in his con-*

siderable self-importance conveys, however, less of real power and vision than MOSES. *Escorted by* EPIPHRAS, *he joins his brother, briefly inclines himself before* PHARAOH, *then, preceded by* EPIPHRAS, *with* MOSES *he approaches the dais, pausing somewhat beneath, and a little to right of the throne. Again* AARON, *though slightly, bows to* PHARAOH.

PHARAOH. [*Pleased by the salutation.*] Hail, Aaron! Thou art more mannerly than thy brother, though thou knowest not so much of courts.

AARON. [*With smooth ambiguity.*] It is but for so short a time I have the opportunity, great Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Suspiciously.*] What meanest thou by that?

AARON. Briefly, oh Pharaoh, and that I be not tedious to thee —for thou hast told me more than once of late that I am tedious, and indeed in more than words that thou deemedst me so, didst thou show me the last time I was in thy presence, when, we having abated the thick locusts, thou didst drive us forth with violence, both me and my brother,—then briefly, oh Pharaoh, I mean that after to-day I shall no more behold thee, since now indeed thou must let the people go!

PHARAOH. [*Turning to* THERMUTHIS.] It is strange how some persons will harp on one string!

THERMUTHIS. [*In a low voice.*] Perchance it were better to grant what he asketh, lest the string snap!

PHARAOH. Nay, but I do not like the tune! It is for him to give over his harping! [*To* AARON *and* MOSES.] Know ye not it is a very sorry tune, that whereon ye play, a tune not fit for the ears of conquerors such as I?

AARON. [*With sudden fire.*] I know ye not as a conqueror, oh Pharaoh! Thou, a greater tyrant than ever thy tyrannical father was before thee! And if it is over such as we that thou thinkest thyself the victor, thou art no better than mad, for pride and vainglory of heart are ever the marks of madness in a king as in humbler men. And if because for a brief span Jehovah giveth thee power to oppress us, His chosen, flatter not thyself that such will continue to be the case, or that the whole period of our bondage or of thy apparent power is more than a vesture of His great glory! For verily thou canst do naught against

Him, oh Pharaoh, seeing that even in that hardness of heart whereof thou vauntest thyself to thy weary court, He is but glorified the more, having ordained the same from the very beginning!

CHIEF MAGICIAN. [*Timidly.*] Pardon, great Pharaoh, but would it please thee to forbid the blasphemy of this man? It displeaseth the gods of Egypt very sorely!

PHARAOH. [*Irritably.*] Thou hearest? Speak no more of thy God!

MOSES. [*Passionately.*] Then command us to silence forevermore, oh Pharaoh, or swiftly, swiftly let us forth! For to speak, and to speak not of God, that were to deny the deepest that is in us!

PHARAOH. [*Curiously.*] I speak much, and my courtiers speak much—when I permit them!—but seldom do we speak of our gods. Why is it that thou and thy people are different?

MOSES. Let my brother answer thee, oh Pharaoh, for he is more learned than I, and hath the greater power of words!

PHARAOH. Not so! For I am weary of his words! They are too many! I like thee better, and thy downright speech [*hastily recollecting himself*]—though in truth I like thee not at all, and I have ever thought, though Aaron worketh his evil imaginings with that rod he is now fingering, yet I have ever thought it was thou, Moses, more than he, which art accountable for the grievous ills which have seemed to come to pass!

AARON. [*Sternly.*] Then know, oh, Pharaoh, that it is neither he nor this our rod which is truly accountable, but that Jehovah at Whose name the chief of thy magicians trembleth, and before Whose deeds the land of Egypt hath lain in deeper bondage than thou metedst out to the children of Israel! And lest more come upon the land, oh, Pharaoh, and upon thyself, I pray thee, keep us no more, but let us go forth unto our Promised Land, we and our little ones, our flocks and our herds, to worship Him Who hath made a covenant with our fathers!

PHARAOH. [*Half rising in his anger.*] Silence! Enough of this! Ye shall not go! [*To the* CHIEF MAGICIAN, *with a side-glance at* AARON'S *rod.*] He hath run out of tricks, and naught now but the sound of his own voice is there to hearten him! [*In a loud voice.*] Our audience is over!

[*There is a general movement, in the midst of which* NICORDION, *the chief Egyptian Taskmaster, steps forward and flings himself before* PHARAOH.

NICORDION. [*Half choking.*] Pardon, oh Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. Nicordion! Ah, I remember! The brother of that good Taskmaster whom Moses slew——!

[*There is a general movement, in which all eyes are turned toward* MOSES. *Feeling the hostility,* THERMUTHIS *stiffens, and turns to* PHARAOH.

THERMUTHIS. [*In a low voice.*] Thou recallest thy promise unto me?

PHARAOH. [*To* THERMUTHIS.] That I would not exact the penalty for his deed? [*As she silently bows.*] Well, I have not! [*He turns again to* NICORDION.] Thou art he who when Moses returned from that mysterious errand in the land of Midian, and demanded that the slaves be freed, importuned me, for vengeance' sake, to increase the burdens! Thou art he!

NICORDION. I am that man, oh Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Approvingly.*] Ah! Thou art an useful overseer! He who extorteth the greatest labor from those under him is ever deserving of the greatest reward from his master, since it is as if he himself performed the toil! [*Turning to the court for praise.*] Is it not so?

NICORDION. [*Desperately, in the chorus of approval.*] Thou sayest, oh Pharaoh! And now—now—for that reason, I beseech of thee, to let them go!

PHARAOH. [*Starting.*] What? Art thou mad? Or dost thou make merry? [*As he regards him.*] Nay, but thy face is white! Explain thyself!

NICORDION. [*Trying to control himself.*] That can I not do, oh Pharaoh, for I myself understand not! I know only that though at the first, when they went forth groaning to find their own straw, and turned against Moses their leader because they deemed their burdens the price of his pride, that I was lifted up. And the spectre of my dead brother whom Moses slew visited me no more as aforetime. And then—then—when Holy Nile became blood——

[*He stops, his face convulsed.*

PHARAOH. [*Coldly.*] What aileth thee?

NICORDION. [*Wildly, as* MIRIAM, *unnoticed by all, enters silently, left.*] Ah, how may I tell of it? I tasted thereof! I tasted thereof, on that first day! Before I knew—and it was blood! Blood! As it were the blood of the children of Israel whom I had killed with the lash at their labor! And now—ever I taste it! [*Spitting frantically.*] Nor can I spew it out of my mouth——! [*As several crowd about him, trying to suppress him, he screams.*] Let them go! I beseech thee, let them go!

PHARAOH. [*In cold anger to the* 1ST *and* 2ND GUARDS.] Take him away! He is mad!

[*The* 2ND GUARD, *who has tremblingly helped to subdue* NICORDION, *now suddenly lets go of him, and flings himself before* PHARAOH.

2ND GUARD. Mercy! Mercy! For my wife's sake, great Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Disgustedly.*] Art thou mad, too?

2ND GUARD. Nay, but she is! Of the crawling frogs—and I fear—oh, Pharaoh, I fear! Let them go!

PHARAOH. Now is my court become a madhouse with such as ye about! [*Angrily, to* EPIPHRAS.] Get them away! [*As, led by* EPIPHRAS, *fresh guards remove the offenders,* PHARAOH *continues suavely, to the court.*] We will stay yet awhile! We will not go upon the heels of such as they! [*With a nod to the Musicians.*] We will have music! And where is my dancing girl, even my fairest? Let some one fetch her! [*Insolently, to* MOSES *and* AARON *as a guard goes out.*] Ye may tarry here while ye find another conjuring-trick! But our audience is over!

CHIEF MAGICIAN. [*Tottering forward as the music begins.*] Mercy, oh, Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Sarcastically.*] Ah, thou art recovered! Thou wouldst offer thy services with the rod!

CHIEF MAGICIAN. [*Solemnly.*] Mock not, great Pharaoh! [*Raising his rod before* PHARAOH.] Thou seest? Thou knowest that with this I have ever served thee and thy fathers before thee? [*As* PHARAOH *impatiently nods, his eyes on the beautiful girl who now enters, and takes her place, after an embrace, at his feet.*] Then know that though my heart is true to thee, oh, King, and to the land of Egypt, I can do no more!

[*He breaks the rod in pieces.*

PHARAOH. [*Imperiously.*] Enough! I care not! [*He bends down and again embraces the girl.*] Ah, it is thou! Make me forget him! Make me forget them all!—Moses and Aaron and the plagues of Egypt! Dance, thou beauty—dance! Dance till I forget!

[*She rises softly, glides out upon the floor, and dances as if for him alone. He leans forward, flushed as with her youth.*

PHARAOH. [*As she falls, exhausted at his feet.*] Who saith I am old? [*Raising her.*] Again! Again! [*She is about to dance again when the* CHIEF MAGICIAN, *with a dignity born of his new despair, lays a restraining hand upon her arm.* PHARAOH *turns to him angrily.*] How now, old man? Thou art in thy dotage, else——

CHIEF MAGICIAN. [*Solemnly.*] Hold, Pharaoh! A mightier than I is come! [*Holding up the broken rod.*] One who commandeth the stars in their courses, the moon in her tides, and——

[*He breaks off, starting violently, as* MIRIAM *flits forward, her beautiful hair unbound, half dancing to the rhythm of the music. The girl crouches at* PHARAOH'S *knee.*

MIRIAM. [*Half chanting.*] The sun! The sun! One who commandeth the sun, oh Chief of the Magicians! The bright Egyptian sun that is of thy god, oh, King [*picking up the broken pieces of the Egyptian rod and waving them lightly before the staring eyes of* PHARAOH], that is of thy god the sun, that is become a little thing before—before the shadow——!

PHARAOH. [*Hoarsely.*] Who is that? She is like burning marble? [*Pushing the dancer from him.*] Who may it be? [*As he stares upon her.*] How strange she is!

MIRIAM. [*Gliding with the wand to where* MOSES *and* AARON *stand, and waving it above her head.*] He asked for a conjuring-trick, oh, Brother! So thus—thus—with thy rod!

PHARAOH. [*Under his breath.*] It is but the witch-woman, his sister.

[AARON, *half mesmerized, obeys* MIRIAM, *raising his rod in unison with that which she holds.*

AARON. [*In a low hypnotic voice.*] In the name of the great I AM——!

MIRIAM. [*Laughing softly, as the sun begins to dim.*] Lo, what a little thing is a shadow——!

PHARAOH. [*Starting forward angrily.*] Enough of this! [*To the Musicians.*] Why play ye not louder? Think ye not I have heard enough of Aaron's rod?

1ST MUSICIAN. [*Cringingly.*] Pardon, great Pharaoh, we do not see the notes! Our eyes are troubled as it were by a shadow——!

PHARAOH. [*Frowning.*] It is high noon! I marked a most sunny day as I drove hither from my pleasuance-garden! Your eyes are sick!

1ST MUSICIAN. Pardon, great Pharaoh, we will play a song to the sun!

MIRIAM. [*As, in ever deepening shadows, the music again begins.*] Nay, then, that were for the children of Israel! For they shall have light in their dwellings! But thy song should be a song to the shadow—to the shadow that shall presently be darkness—over all the land of Egypt!

EPIPHRAS. [*Entering hurriedly and kneeling before* PHARAOH.] Pardon, great Pharaoh,—a message from the regents on thine outposts!

PHARAOH. [*Leaning forward and taking the scroll.*] I do not see! [*Angrily to the Guards.*] Ye have shut out the sun! Open the portals that I may read!

[*As he sits, his eyes straining to read the scroll, the Guards rush to the portals and open them, a thicker darkness streaming into the throne-room. In sharp terror, sensing the gathering consternation of the court,* PHARAOH *looks up to see that save for the white faces about him, the only light in the room is about the persons of the three Hebrews who stand watching him, their faces full of a silent exultation.*

PHARAOH. [*Trying to speak naturally.*] There must be a storm coming!

EPIPHRAS. [*Kneeling before him.*] It is not the season for storms, most mighty Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Peevishly.*] It must be a storm! [*To himself.*] Yet it was not the season for storms when the fiery hail descended!

1ST GUARD. [*Who has looked out.*] Pardon, most great Pharaoh, but it is not a storm!

PHARAOH. I asked thee not! Of a certainty there is no storm, nor [*his eyes on the Hebrews*] nor is there darkness! Our eyes tire from much looking on the brightness of the sun! [*To* EPIPHRAS.] See that the Guards bring torches! Often they do rest mine eyes from our mighty sun!

EPIPHRAS. [*As the Guards go out.*] If it be for the words of the scroll, most noble Pharaoh, I can tell thee, for there is haste, and the messenger told me he had learned the burden of the words by heart, they being not many!

PHARAOH. Why learned he the scroll by heart?

EPIPHRAS. [*Timidly.*] Pardon, most mighty Pharaoh,—a shadow troubled his eyes as he drew near, and he told me he thought,—"If now peradventure a darkness should come, a thick darkness and the mighty Pharaoh could not read the words——" so he learned them, knowing they were of grave import!

PHARAOH. He took much upon himself! But doubtless they are messages of victory! Repeat them to us!

EPIPHRAS. [*Haltingly, as the shadows deepen.*] Pardon, most mighty Pharaoh—this is the message from the regents of thy provinces: "How long wilt thou be a snare unto us? Let the Hebrews go, that they may serve the Lord their God! Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?"

[*As* PHARAOH, *white with anger, starts up from the throne, there is a long, wailing scream from one of the women of the court, as the Guards return, bearing dimly flaring torches.*

PHARAOH. [*Beside himself.*] Who screamed? Let her be cast forth! And as for that message—it—it is a trick! [*Kicking* EPIPHRAS.] Get ye gone! [*Angrily, to the Guards, as* EPIPHRAS, *half stunned, stumbles away.*] I told ye to bring hither torches!

1ST TORCHBEARER. [*Tremblingly, nearing the throne.*] Pardon, oh, Pharaoh! Here is the torch!

PHARAOH. But unlighted! It shineth scarce a foot before thee! How darest thou to mock me?

1ST TORCHBEARER. [*As before.*] Yet is it lighted, great Pharaoh!

1ST GUARD. Perchance if the light of the two were put together, oh mighty Pharaoh!

PHARAOH. [*Beckoning the* 2ND TORCHBEARER.] Hither! Draw close about me! [*As they obey, he unwinds the scroll.*] Now shall I read of victory! [*As, by the wavering light, he makes out the message, he flings it violently from him, shouting.*] They lie! They lie! And in letters of fire——! They are all that I see in this reeling room, "Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed!" They lie, and they are all I see! They—and her witch's face——!

MOSES. [*Stepping forward, the pool of light in which he stands widening as he moves.*] Pharaoh, let the people go! If not upon thyself, yet upon thy land have pity!

THERMUTHIS. [*Falling upon her knees before* PHARAOH.] For the sake of Egypt, oh Pharaoh, let the people go!

[*As, following her example, several of the courtiers and guards fall upon their knees with cries of "Mighty Pharaoh! Let the people go!" "Merciful Pharaoh, let them worship the Lord their God!" the darkness lifts slightly. Perceiving it,* PHARAOH *breaks into a shout of cynical victory.*

PHARAOH. Fie now! Out upon ye for cowardly traitors! It is lifting! The darkness departs! Never was there a darkness, and never, by all the gods of Egypt, shall I let the people go!

[*There is a moment of vibrant silence, into which, thicker than before, the darkness sweeps, engulfing all but the three Hebrews. Again there comes the weird scream, but before* PHARAOH *can finish his violent "Away with her! She is mad!"* MIRIAM *flits forward, more beautiful than before.*

MIRIAM. [*Chanting, in low, rising passion.*] She is not mad, oh Pharaoh! She sees! She sees! That which must befall——! [*As another cry interrupts her.*] And another seeth—another—a woman with a babe! For thou art right, oh Pharaoh, yet is not Egypt destroyed! But it shall be! It shall be!

PHARAOH. [*In shivering fear.*] Lights! Lights! Hold her—that terrible witch——! It is she that bringeth these forms that I see—that I do not see! Lights! Hold her! Lo, it is a thick darkness, none like it saw I ever before—it is a darkness which may be felt! [*As Guards try to seize her, at his command,*

MIRIAM *eludes them in the shifting light.*] Make her to cease! Ah, ye cannot find her—she is not there—only the forms are there—the terrible forms—ah, bind her, seize her!

MOSES. [*Gently to* MIRIAM.] Peace—our Sister! Perchance he will now repent!

AARON. [*Sombrely.*] Aye, he repenteth, ever after to sin again!

MOSES. Shall the people go, oh Pharaoh, if God will remove the thick darkness?

PHARAOH. [*Between his chattering teeth.*] The people shall not go!

MIRIAM. [*In sombre triumph.*] Then a child——! A child and a babe! And a young man and a maiden! From the first-born of the captive in his dungeon to the first-born of him which sitteth upon his throne! Death! Death! Over all the land of Egypt! Death!

PHARAOH. [*Staggering down from the throne and attempting to seize* MIRIAM.] Out! Out! Get ye from my presence! [*As he cannot find* MIRIAM, *between set teeth.*] Yet shall I pay thee for this! [*Then, violently, to* MOSES *and* AARON.] Get ye gone! Let me see thy face no more!

[*There is a confusion of stumbling feet and terrified voices, as the court, in the almost utter blackness, tries to hide itself, the dancing girl still clinging to* PHARAOH, *long heedless of her. From the three Hebrews, now standing together near the door, left, comes the voice of* MOSES, *charged with triumph.*

MOSES. Thou hast spoken well, oh Pharaoh! We will see thy face no more until we go unto the Promised Land!

CURTAIN

ACT III

PLACE: *The House of Moses.*

TIME: *Evening of the Passover. Between Acts II and III four days have passed.*

SCENE: *The curtain rises on a large room furnished in the ancient simplicity of the Hebrews. There are doors to left and right. The door right gives on the street; that on the left opens into an inner room, in which, when the door is fully open, another and smaller door can be made out to rear. This also leads outdoors. At rear near a window is a large open fireplace divided into two parts, of which one holds a cauldron filled with water. The other part, though a fire may be seen glowing from beneath, is empty. Rush mats are scattered at intervals about the floor, and a table stands somewhat to centre. Upon it is a lighted brazier which softly illumines a confusion of gold and silver ornaments, flung about, as in haste.*

There is a moment of silence; then MOSES' *little boy,* ELEASAR, *comes running in, right. At sight of the booty, he stops short, and begins to finger it with keen delight.*

ELEASAR. [*Gloatingly.*] My, didn't she get a lot? [*Picking up a large silver plate, he calls.*] Gershom! I say, Gershom, come here! [*Hefting the plate.*] Whew, it's heavy! It must weigh ten omers! [*Calling.*] Ger—*shom*——!

[*There is a patter of feet and* GERSHOM, *a handsome child, slightly older than his brother, enters, right. About both there is an air of pleased excitement.*

GERSHOM. What is it? Is it about the lamb? Hath Uncle Aaron brought it? [*As he sees the booty.*] Oo——!

ELEASAR. [*His eyes sparkling.*] Yea! Mother got them from the Egyptians!

GERSHOM. [*Letting the silver run through his fingers.*] My——! Are not they beautiful!

ELEASAR. [*Reflectively.*] They must be worth an awful lot! I wish they were mine!

GERSHOM. [*Indifferently, in his sheer delight at their beauty.*] What wouldst thou do?

ELEASAR. Sell 'em!

GERSHOM. But why? If they were sold, then couldst thou not touch them, and see how they twinkle in the firelight!

ELEASAR. [*Stoutly.*] I wish they were mine! I'd sell 'em!

GERSHOM. If they were mine, I should dedicate them unto the Lord! Then might Pharaoh let us go!

ELEASAR. We're going anyway! Father said so! Almost any time, now! [*Pulling up a silver cup.*] Feel how heavy! I bet that would bring a lot!

GERSHOM. [*Excitedly snatching it from him.*] A cup! A silver cup! Oh, Eleasar, dost thou know what I deem that to be?

ELEASAR. Yes, I have eyes and but now thou saidst it,—a cup!

GERSHOM. [*As before.*] Nay, but *what* cup? Oh, guess, quick, quick!

ELEASAR. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, ask Aunt Miriam! Thou knowest I am no hand at guessing!

GERSHOM. [*Dancing about, the cup in his hand.*] Nay, but 'twas ours from of old! Ours, the children of Israel's! I feel it! I feel it!

ELEASAR. Oh, do stop jumping about! Of a surety it is all ours —what we spoil! Uncle Aaron said so, seeing the Egyptians have paid us naught in wages for three hundred years! That would bring a lot more than all this [*with a gesture toward the table*]— reckoned in silver and gold!

GERSHOM. I mean not that! [*Turning the cup lovingly in his hand.*] This hath a story! Father hath told us the story often! Oh, I would he were here!

ELEASAR. He will come soon! Thou knowest he searcheth for the burial-place of Joseph!

GERSHOM. But that is just it! That is what I would tell thee! [*Coming close to his brother, holding up the cup; he speaks in a thrilled whisper.*] Brother, dost thou not see? Look at the markings! Why, 'tis the cup Joseph himself put in the sack of little Benjamin, all those long, long days ago, and as he guided his brothers to it, before revealing himself to them, so perchance tonight——

[*He stops at a quick knock on the door, left, and* ELEASAR,

bored with the recital, runs to open it. There is a hush, then DATHAN, *the Hebrew slave, enters furtively. Seeing only the two little boys, however, he makes a show of courage.*

DATHAN. [*Looking from one to the other.*] Is thy mother Zipporah here?

GERSHOM. Yea, she is inside, lying upon her bed! She hath been from home all day, getting that [*with a proud gesture*] and she's awful tired!

ELEASAR. But she's awful pleased! Are not they rich and beautiful? How much has thy wife got?

DATHAN. [*With swift anger.*] My wife? What meanest thou? [*Suspiciously.*] Who told thee I had a wife? [*Sneeringly.*] Perchance 'twas Miriam, the all-seeing sister of Moses!

ELEASAR. No, 'twas not Aunt Miriam! 'Twas Mother I heard talking yesterday with the Egyptian messenger! She stopped when I came near! [*Backing away.*] But why art thou displeased with me?

DATHAN. [*Abruptly.*] Zipporah thy mother hath sent for me! Tell her I wait, and time passeth!

[ELEASAR *goes out, right, and* GERSHOM *approaches the slave.*

GERSHOM. [*Eagerly.*] Hast thou seen the killing of the lambs? I wished greatly to go, but when it drew nigh the time, I remembered how one of them had been my pet, and I could not bear to see it killed!

DATHAN. [*Contemptuously.*] And thou a son of Moses! Fie, that he who killed Batinas the great Taskmaster should beget a son that could not stomach the slaying of a lamb!

GERSHOM. [*Puzzled and embarrassed.*] I know it was foolish——! Pray tell not my father!

DATHAN. Nay, I shall not! Neither that nor aught else shall I tell Moses thy father!

GERSHOM. [*Curiously.*] Why dost thou look so bitterly when thou speakest of him? Did not that deed whereof he oft hath told me deliver thee from a cruel oppressor?

DATHAN. The deed *he* did? [*Very bitterly.*] Yea, and if it were cast in my teeth these ten years by Shelomith my wife that it was not I who had killed Batinas!

GERSHOM. [*Puzzled.*] But why *thou,* rather than my father? We are Hebrews no less than thou, and hate the oppressor! My father was glad to kill him! Why should thy wife exact it of *thee?*

DATHAN. My wife? Ah, *because* she is my wife, in vengeance, in vengeance! [*As the child gazes at him with clear eyes.*] Pah, thou art a child! Thou understandest naught! [*Bitterly.*] Thou thinkest I should thank him! Thank Moses thy father, when all he hath given me is a bondage more bitter than before, and a wife that scorns the very ground my feet tread! And thine Aunt that bade me rejoice! Thine Aunt that is drunk with liberty! Ah, how I hate them all! She and he and thine accursed house!

GERSHOM. [*Drawing himself up.*] I think that is no way to speak of my family! My mother will——

DATHAN. [*Significantly.*] I have said naught against thy mother! She is not like the rest!

[*The door right opens, and* ZIPPORAH *enters, followed by* ELEASAR. *She is a sumptuously beautiful woman, richly and indiscriminately decked in jewels, a gorgeous Egyptian mantle dragging from her arm. With a gesture, as of clearing away the children who retire somewhat cowed into a corner, she goes to* DATHAN, *gathering up a handful of gold as she passes the table, and pressing it into his hands with a defiance somehow touched with servility.*

ZIPPORAH. [*Softly.*] Hush! Not a word! Aaron returneth! I saw him but now from the window, and was half minded not to speak with thee! Hence——! Make haste!

DATHAN. [*Whiningly letting the gold slip through his fingers.*] And is this all? When it hath cost thee naught——?

ZIPPORAH. [*Indignantly.*] Cost me naught? When I have been out all day calling at every house this side the river, until I am so weary I could scarce prepare the herbs and unleavened bread for to-night——!

DATHAN. [*In a low voice.*] Thou art a strange woman, Zipporah! Preparing for the Passover, and conspiring against thy husband at even the same moment!

ZIPPORAH. [*Darting a look at the children, who are playing with the booty.*] Sh——! How darest thou?

DATHAN. How darest *thou? I* have naught to lose——!

ZIPPORAH. Be not a fool! Thou lovest the wilderness no more than I! And if thou art released from thy burdens here——

DATHAN. [*In a whisper.*] Hast thou it yet?

ZIPPORAH. [*With a warning gesture.*] Nay! Aaron hath it with him! But I shall have it when there is need thereof.

DATHAN. [*Regarding her.*] It seems Moses and Dathan are alike unfortunate in their choice of wives——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Haughtily.*] Begone at once to the Palace, or——

DATHAN. [*Watching her.*] Or what? Knowest thou not yet thou art in my power? Remember 'tis not I alone who know thy perfidy—'tis Epiphras, also,—if not a greater than he! —and——

ZIPPORAH. [*Frantically.*] Hush! And begone!

DATHAN. [*As before.*] Yea, and though my hatred of Moses thy husband is passing bitter, so that I would what thou wouldst, Zipporah, if only to hurt him, yet shall I get my price from thee! [*Suddenly savage.*] Make haste! I want gold!

ZIPPORAH. [*Sullenly, her greed struggling with her fear.*] More gold? For what? Thou canst not use so much!

DATHAN. What is that to thee? [*Suddenly he bursts into hysterical tears.*] Gold! Give me more gold! Or I go not to Pharaoh!

[*After a quick look,* ZIPPORAH *hurries out of the room, left, returning almost at once, her hands overflowing with jewels and fresh gold, which she presses into his trembling hands.*

ZIPPORAH. [*Contemptuously.*] Is that enough?

DATHAN. [*In hysterical laughter.*] Yea! Now perchance she will look upon me to-night—Shelomith, my wife!

[*With bent head he rushes out, left, not pausing to greet* AARON *who presently enters, bearing aloft in his arms a freshly killed lamb. There is about him an air of solemn exultation, at sharp variance with the flushed excitement of* ZIPPORAH *who is nervously toying with the booty. At the sound of his step, she wheels abruptly about. The children run toward him, stopping quickly, as he speaks.*

AARON. [*Holding high the lamb.*] Behold, woman, and let the eyes of the children of Moses behold,—the Paschal Lamb!

ZIPPORAH. [*Officiously coming forward.*] I have the water for the fleecing! All that thou biddest me I have performed!

AARON. [*Preoccupied with the scene he has gone through.*] It is well!

[*Half reluctantly, he is about to give it to her, when the door left again opens, and* MIRIAM *enters. At sight of the lamb, her face kindles, and she stands rooted upon the threshold, with bated breath and outstretched, yearning arms.*

MIRIAM. [*Raptly.*] The lamb——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Crossly.*] Yea, the lamb! And what should there be surprising to thee in that?

GERSHOM. [*Going to* MIRIAM *and gently taking her hand.*] Why, Aunt Miriam, what aileth thee? Said not Father so, that we should hold the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month?

ELEASAR. And this is that day and that month!

ZIPPORAH. [*Under her breath.*] Much hath she done to help me prepare!

AARON. [*To* ZIPPORAH, *softly, looking at* MIRIAM.] Peace——!

MIRIAM. [*As before.*] The lamb——!

AARON. [*Kindly, to* MIRIAM.] Is there sickness coming upon thee, Sister, that thou lookest so? I marked thine eyes how they followed me, out of all the congregation! Is it a fever which cometh upon thee that they shine thus like stars?

MIRIAM. [*Moving slightly forward.*] Then it is true——!

AARON. What, Miriam? What is true? [*Turning to* ZIPPORAH.] I would Moses were here! Oft he is of comfort to her when she is as now! [*Rousing himself.*] Here—take the lamb, Zipporah, and put it in the cauldron, that I may the easier fleece it!

MIRIAM. [*Searchingly interposing as* ZIPPORAH *is about to take the lamb from* AARON.] And thine hands, Zipporah? Are they clean to touch the lamb?

ZIPPORAH. [*Starting.*] What meanest thou? [*Stammering and drawing back after a glance into* MIRIAM'S *eyes.*] They are too clean! He still drippeth blood!

AARON. [*Sensing the clash between the two.*] I will put the lamb into the water myself! There is little time, and the mark is not yet made upon the door!

MIRIAM. Ah——! The mark upon the door! It was to be in blood, was it not, oh, Aaron?

AARON. [*Pointing to the small bason he holds.*] Yea, in the blood of the lambs we have but now killed! Each man is making the sign to-night upon the lintel and upon the two side posts of the house wherein they shall eat the Passover!

MIRIAM. [*Softly.*] May a woman make the mark, oh Aaron?

AARON. [*Uncertainly.*] Thou hast ever been faithful, Miriam! And Moses is not yet returned! He went out again to hearten the people and seek the burial-place after the killing of the lambs! And I have much upon my mind!—If therefore thou dost wish to make the mark——

ZIPPORAH. [*Angrily, as* MIRIAM *takes the bason.*] So thou givest it to her to do, who hath not so much as adorned herself? Why not me, oh, Aaron? I who have spoiled the Egyptians the whole day that I might be passing beautiful to-night!

MIRIAM. [*Giving her a look.*] Beautiful for the eyes of the Angel of Death, Zipporah?

AARON. [*As* ZIPPORAH *turns quickly away.*] Hast thou the bunch of hyssop?

MIRIAM. [*Drawing it slowly from her dress.*] Here——!

AARON. How didst thou know?

MIRIAM. I hoped!

AARON. [*Solemnly.*] Now dip the hyssop in the blood of the lamb!

[*She obeys, the two children, and momentarily even* ZIPPORAH, *looking on awed and still as the hyssop gleams scarlet.*

MIRIAM. [*With a deep breath.*] It is done! [*As she turns to go out, left.*] Oh, Aaron, all my life I have hoped, and to-night [*holding up the hyssop*]—to-night I believe!

[*She goes out, left, and* AARON *busies himself with the fleecing of the lamb in the rear of the room; the children stand tensely, looking from* AARON *to the door whence* MIRIAM *has gone out.* ZIPPORAH *stands silent, frowning.*

ELEASAR. [*Softly to* GERSHOM.] I wonder, are the Egyptians very much frightened?

GERSHOM. [*In low tones.*] Yea, Father saith they fear greatly, since it is known of all that he hath refused to go again to Pharaoh!

ELEASAR. Well, in the plague of the thick darkness, Pha-

raoh commanded him and Uncle Aaron never to trouble him again!

GERSHOM. Yea, but now Pharaoh feareth even more, death being more fearsome than even the thick darkness!

ELEASAR. I think the thick darkness would be worse than death! Why, Gershom, even ordinary darkness is frightening,—though I am not afraid when Father holdeth mine hand! [*In an excited whisper.*] Gershom——! Dost thou know, I saw the child of the 2nd Guard this morning, and he told me his mother desired greatly to send him over to our house to-night——!

GERSHOM. So he'd be safe——? That would be well! I heard Father say his father sorely displeased Pharaoh in the last audience!

ELEASAR. Lots of the Egyptians are going back on him!

GERSHOM. Father saith Pharaoh warreth against God!

ZIPPORAH. [*Irritably, having caught the last words.*] And hast thou naught to do but play the eavesdropper?

GERSHOM. Nay, Mother, it was not eavesdropping! My father wished me to hear! He was not angry, as thou wert when Eleasar saw thee speaking with Epiphras the Egyptian!

ZIPPORAH. [*Starting violently.*] So thou dost contradict thy mother! [*Boxing his ear.*] Let that learn thee!

AARON. [*Turning with displeasure.*] Hush! Is not all this amiss? On such a night as this,—yea, a night to be remembered as a memorial from generation to generation?

ZIPPORAH. [*Sullenly.*] And thou, an Hebrew, taketh the part of a child against his parent?

AARON. [*Calmly.*] I take no part, woman! But it is right for a son to hearken to his father, as little Gershom to Moses! [*With a sigh.*] I would mine own sons hearkened more to me! [*Then, rousing himself.*] But where is Miriam? Why does she not return?

[GERSHOM *goes to the door right, and opens it, revealing* MIRIAM *standing on the threshold, a look of mingled exultation, wonder and pity on her face. She enters, closing the door behind her.*

AARON. It waxeth late, Miriam! Thou hast made the mark?

MIRIAM. [*Her eyes far away.*] Yea,—upon the lintel, and upon the two side posts!

ZIPPORAH. [*With a shiver of distaste, pointing to the drenched hyssop.*] Wilt thou wash?

MIRIAM. [*Looking at her hands dreamily, as she sets down the hyssop.*] Why, Zipporah? I think my hands never felt so clean as now! [*Turning slowly to* AARON.] I do not understand, Brother! It is as if they had been washed in the blood of the lamb, and were clean forevermore!

AARON. What thou hast done was done as to the Lord! [*He turns to the hearth.*] And now that the fleecing is accomplished [*raising the lamb*], I put the lamb upon the spit to be roasted with fire, and unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs!

[ZIPPORAH, *busied near the hearth, is handing the bread and herbs to him, and he is putting it upon the fire when the door right again opens and* MOSES *enters. Like* MIRIAM'S, *his manner is one of repressed exultation, but, except at rare moments, it is practical, rather than mystical, as of one increasingly, though calmly aware of the responsibilities of his great leadership. Perceiving the employment of* AARON, *he stands waiting.*

AARON. [*Beckoning* MOSES *to him.*] Come hither, Moses!

MOSES. [*Slowly approaching.*] The Paschal Lamb——!

AARON. Yea, Moses! The fleecing is done, the unleavened bread, and the herbs and the fire are prepared. It wants but thy hand to be roasted with fire!

MOSES. [*With a great cry, raising the lamb, as the others assume attitudes of reverence.*] Unto thee, oh Jehovah! Unto Thee, this sacrifice of the Children of Israel!

[*There is a moment of awed stillness, during which* MOSES *places the Passover upon the fire. Then, silently greeting the others, he turns to* AARON.

MOSES. And the mark, Aaron, upon the door? How came it into thy mind to make it thus?

AARON. What meanest thou? I have not seen the mark!

ZIPPORAH. [*Officiously.*] Perchance Miriam, thine all-holy sister, could tell thee! She took it upon herself to make the mark!

MOSES. [*Flushing and turning to* MIRIAM.] So it was thou——!

MIRIAM. Yea—I! What is wrong with the mark, Moses?

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] I do not know that aught is wrong there-

with! When the Lord spake unto me, He said only, "Strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood!"

[*He stops, remembering.*

MIRIAM. That did I do!

GERSHOM. [*Nestling against* MOSES.] What is the mark, Father? May I run out and see?

MOSES. [*Pressing him close.*] Nay, child! Lest the Angel of Death should snatch thee from mine arms! [*Turning to the others.*] None shall leave the house this night, save Aaron and myself! [*Then, to* MIRIAM.] Thou knowest I was hastening home, after my search after the killing of the lambs, for the bones of Joseph, our forefather——

ZIPPORAH. [*Skeptically.*] Well, hast thou found them?

MOSES. [*Patiently.*] Peace, woman! Nay, not yet, but the Lord will show them me! Did the children of Israel not straitly swear unto Him to carry them hence at the going forth? [*He turns again to* MIRIAM.] My mind was full of thoughts of Israel, and the confusion which this night cometh upon the mighty Pharaoh——

ZIPPORAH. It passeth my reason how thou canst be so sure——!

MOSES. [*More sternly.*] Have I not told thee—peace? [*Again, to* MIRIAM.] And then, as I came near, I saw the mark upon the door—thy mark, oh, Miriam! And my heart was exalted! It was as if I felt His glory all about me, as when the Bush burned and I heard His voice! But to-night I heard nothing—only I felt the glory! And something else I felt [*as if seeking for words*]—something I understood not!

MIRIAM. [*Softly.*] Thou, too? [*Then, with sudden passion.*] Ah, Brother, what was it which came to me there, teaching me to make the mark? I stood so still, the stars so quiet above me, and Nile swift-flowing in the darkness, and over yonder the mighty tombs of the helpless dead, and I thought, as thou, of the Children of Israel, and of our Passover this night, and of the lamb whose blood shone red upon the hyssop in mine hand, and then [*raising her hand, and with her fingers tracing a cross*]—then I made the mark—thus——!

[*She repeats the mark of the cross.*

MOSES. A cross!

MIRIAM. Yea, a cross! [*Continuing haltingly.*] And it was

then for a moment a strange sense seized me—I scarce know the name therefor—as it were pity or compassion, such as I felt a while agone when little Gershom lay sick of a fever, and I would have died myself might I have borne his pain!

MOSES. [*Gently.*] I remember, Miriam——!

MIRIAM. But this, to-night—it was not like that compassion for him, or any child, or any weak thing. Nor was it like that pity I felt for the Princess Thermuthis, that day of the audience, when she spake to me of death! This to-night was different, and it is this which I do not understand, and thou perchance wilt think me traitorous for thinking it even for a moment——?

MOSES. [*As before.*] Nay, Sister! Tell me!

MIRIAM. [*Wonderingly.*] It was compassion for Pharaoh [*very low, as if confessing a sin*]—compassion for mine enemies!

AARON. [*Starting forward.*] Nay, Miriam, it is not possible! Pharaoh is not thine enemy only—he is the enemy of the Children of Israel!

MOSES. Thou art mistaken, Sister! Thou didst not feel compassion for Pharaoh! Pharaoh is the enemy of Jehovah——!

MIRIAM. I do not know, Moses, of a truth! I hate him as ever, of a child! But I did feel compassion, for that one moment! And though it seemeth to have been sin as ye both speak thereof now, yet while I felt it, it was not like sin, but like something so beautiful—— [*Turning to Moses, her voice breaking.*] Oh, Moses, so full of beauty and peace!

ZIPPORAH. [*Bursting into shrill laughter.*] Hear the holy woman! The prophetess of the Children of Israel! Loving her enemies!

MOSES. [*To* ZIPPORAH, *embarrassed and stern.*] Have I not told thee peace? It is not so!

ZIPPORAH. [*Violently.*] Yea, thou hast told me! But doth that make it true? Have I not heard her with mine own ears? [*Continuing shrilly, before he can stop her.*] Oh, thou hast told me much, Moses, in the ten years thou hast had me for thy wife, ever loving and anxious to serve thee! Hanging on thine every whim! And look at thy reward——! Bringing me into a foreign exile, out from my father's home, and the happy laughter at the fountain and the ever-courteous shepherd-youths! And then, the moment I begin to grow used thereto, driving me hence, me, thy

wife, like so much cattle, out of my home into the untrodden desert!

MOSES. [*Sternly, as* AARON *goes out, right, his lips compressed.*] If thou art without proper pride for thyself, wilt thou blast the ears of my children [*motioning them quickly to the door, left, whence they go out, frightened*]—with such blasphemy on the night of the Liberation?

ZIPPORAH. [*Irrepressibly.*] Liberation from what? I see naught wrong with the land of Egypt, save the plagues brought upon it by thy brother's rod! And even so, they do not disturb me greatly! And now that at least I have raiment and jewels fitting to my beauty [*for a moment she pauses, looking venomously at* MIRIAM *who has stood silent, from one to the other; then she continues, self-righteously*]—for I at least, low and worthless as thou deemest me, oh Moses, *I* have adorned myself! Behold——! [*She turns slowly before him in her gaudy finery; then, as she sees she has failed to excite him, she continues angrily.*] Yet thou darest to speak to me of blasphemy! To me, Zipporah! And look at her! [*With infinite scorn.*] Look at Miriam, thy sister!

MOSES. [*Turning to* MIRIAM.] What meaneth she?

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] That I have not adorned myself, Moses!

ZIPPORAH. [*Eagerly.*] There! Thou hearest? And look at me——! [*Again she preens herself before his calm eyes.*] All day I have fulfilled the command! All day I have spoiled the Egyptians! And then, worn and weary as I am with my spoiling and with preparing thy holy feast, I have adorned myself! [*Stamping her foot.*] Speak! Have I not?

MOSES. [*Hastily, after an indifferent glance.*] Yea, yea, Zipporah! Thou hast adorned thyself! [*Then, turning troubled eyes to* MIRIAM.] And thou, Sister? Didst thou not hear the command? Why hast thou not spoiled the Egyptians?

MIRIAM. [*With low distinctness.*] I *have* spoiled the Egyptians, oh, Moses!

ZIPPORAH. [*Shrilly.*] She lieth! Believe her not! She weareth not so much as a bracelet upon her arm!

MOSES. What hast thou to say?

MIRIAM. Thou knowest, Brother, there was no command to adorn? [*As he bows, she continues, quickly, before he can interrupt her.*] But I knew thou and Aaron wished it! That the

Children of Israel understood it so! Only—oh, Moses, the time to adorn was the night to go forth!

MOSES. Yea, Miriam! The fourteenth day of the first month, at even! Lo [*pointing to the hearth*]—our Passover which is preparing! And hast thou forgotten the mark upon the door?

MIRIAM. [*Clasping her hands, tensely.*] Nay, Brother——! Ah, be not vexed with me——! [*As* MOSES *stands watching* MIRIAM, ZIPPORAH, *with a stealthy gesture, snatches up* AARON'S *rod, which has been lying upon the table, since his entrance in the first part of the act, and, first toying with it, until she has made sure they are too absorbed to notice her, hides it swiftly in her bosom.*] Be not vexed with me! But it is so mighty a deed——! [*Pressing her hand to her throat, as if to still its clamorous throbbing.*] This going out, out of the House of Bondage! And my body is so poor a thing to praise Jehovah! It is with my heart I praise Him, not this poor body of mine! I could not put on the jewels, as she [*pointing to* ZIPPORAH, *who is making a pretense of listening to her*]—I was not beautiful enough! I wished to be straight and tall, like a young cedar, my skin soft and smooth as thine, oh, Brother, as a little babe, in thine ark long ago, upon Nile, my hair fragrant with holy spices, mine eyes bright with the glory I have seen within! Oh, and it was more! [*Very low.*] I wished to be young to-night, to adorn myself as a bride for her bridegroom——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Boisterously.*] That were an adornment indeed!

MIRIAM. [*With quick anger.*] Yea, Zipporah! [*Going to the door, left.*] It were!

[MIRIAM *goes out, leaving* MOSES *and* ZIPPORAH *alone. Troubled, he turns to her at once.*

MOSES. How often I have told thee not to anger her! Knowest thou not she is unlike other women?

ZIPPORAH. [*Sullenly.*] Yea, I know that! It needeth not the months of my life in Egypt to learn so much! [*Contemptuously.*] Yet she is not so unlike as thou thinkest——! If she had but been wed——! But she is dark! [*Touching her fair hair complacently.*] Doubtless no man would have her!

MOSES. [*Embarrassed.*] Yet I remember as a young child, long years ago, when she was a maid, Pharaoh thought her beautiful!

ZIPPORAH. [*Sarcastically.*] That would have been a fine couple, would it not?—Pharaoh and thy sister, Miriam!

MOSES. [*With distaste.*] It is not matter for jesting!

ZIPPORAH. [*Struck by a thought.*] I jest not! I see naught strange in the mating of an Hebrew and an Egyptian!

MOSES. [*Sternly.*] I do!

ZIPPORAH. [*Regarding him with a smile.*] Yet I heard the gossip when I came here first, how that thou hadst almost wed the Princess Thermuthis ere thou didst go to Midian!

MOSES. [*Coloring.*] It is but talk! Regard it not!

ZIPPORAH. [*Coming closer, trying to caress him.*] Nay, but Zipporah can understand how she would love thee! Thou wert but a boy, then, no zealot as now! Of a surety the Princess would love thee!

MOSES. [*Restively.*] I tell thee it is not true! Thermuthis loved me not!

ZIPPORAH. [*Pressing closer.*] Nor would I be angry with thee, seeing I have not the jealous disposition of some, nor the narrow barriers of race of others [*pausing for a significant glance*]—if even now, Moses, thou didst take her, along with me——!

MOSES. [*Breaking violently away, in stupefaction.*] Take who——? Of whom art thou jesting?

ZIPPORAH. [*Sullenly.*] I tell thee I jest not! Ne'er was I in greater earnest! And I know she would love thee! Indeed [*looking at him with a smile abhorrent to him*], I think she will die if thou dost not soon have pity on her!

MOSES. [*Striving for self-control.*] I tell thee, Zipporah, thy jests are ill-timed! Nor know I yet, nor wish to know, of whom thou dost jest!

ZIPPORAH. Of Thermuthis! [*Quickly, before he can stop her.*] Nay, let me speak—— [*Trying to draw him to her.*] Think not of me in this!

MOSES. [*Bitterly.*] I do not!

ZIPPORAH. [*Growing angry.*] No, thou art right, there! For never, since the day thou didst blow kisses to my visage reflected there in the sparkling water of our fountain in the land of Midian, and didst take me to thy wife, never since hast thou bestowed on me the favor of a passing moment! And now, on top of all, when I have ever been a faithful wife, nor let mine eyes stray one day

toward those kind youths who would have held me dear if thou hadst not come wandering with thy vision on Horeb, now, when to save thee the terrors of the very wilderness, I give thee leave to wed another, that thou and all of us may continue to dwell here in something of security and peace [*bursting into violent tears*], now, now, thou dost berate me with looks more stern and angry than the darkling sky to Pharaoh on that day of thick darkness!

MOSES. [*With clenched hands.*] I have tried to school mine anger! I have tried to be meek! But——

ZIPPORAH. [*Furiously.*] Meek? Meek! And who asked thee to be meek? Surely not I!

MOSES. [*Turning from her.*] No, not thou, Zipporah! Something thou couldst not understand! [*In a low voice.*] Mine own heart schooling me, after mine hands had slain——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Annoyed.*] And what hath that to do with me?

MOSES. Naught!

ZIPPORAH. [*Bitterly.*] Just so! And naught in thy mind, since that first day beside the fountain, hath ever had to do with me!

MOSES. [*With effort.*] I am thy husband!

ZIPPORAH. [*Tearfully.*] Thou dost not love me!

MOSES. [*Trying to be convincing.*] Yea, Zipporah, I love thee! Hath not Jehovah——

ZIPPORAH. [*Sobbing, suddenly flinging her arms about his neck.*] Then prove it to me!

MOSES. [*Soothingly, trying to disengage himself.*] Hush, Zipporah! Thou art not well! The preparations have been too much for thee!

ZIPPORAH. [*With hysterical laughter.*] Yea, the preparations have been too much for me!

MOSES. Then go and rest awhile! I will go out a little, and look again for Joseph. Rest thyself ere the Passover! It will be a hard night for thee!

ZIPPORAH. [*Ensconcing herself more firmly in his arms.*] Nay, nay, go not! [*As she feels him trying to draw away from her.*] Leave me not, Moses! Leave me not! [*Very low.*] Oh, Moses, thou dost not love me!

MOSES. [*Mildly.*] Surely I love thee!

ZIPPORAH. [*Trying another tack.*] Have I not borne thee sons?

MOSES. [*With some impatience.*] Yea, Zipporah!

ZIPPORAH. And thou lovest little Gershom?

MOSES. Yea, for the Lord gave him me when I was a stranger in a strange land!

ZIPPORAH. Thou wouldst not that harm should come to him?

MOSES. How canst thou ask? Neither to him nor Eleasar, nor thee, Zipporah!

ZIPPORAH. [*Fiercely.*] Then go not out of Egypt!

MOSES. [*Patiently.*] I must go forth, Zipporah! [*With decision, as he regards her.*] Thou art sick!

ZIPPORAH. [*Violently.*] Yea, and sicker shall I be in the wilderness, away from all I have loved! Yea, I and Eleasar and thy little Gershom, sick unto death!

MOSES. [*Rising, outdone.*] Woman! Dost thou not know we eat the Passover this night, and go hence out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, by the hand of the Lord God?

ZIPPORAH. Oh, I would I were wed to a *man*——! What is the Lord God to me?

MOSES. [*Striding toward the door.*] Such blasphemy——! But I do not hear thee! Thou art mad! The marriage of Miriam my sister with Pharaoh! Of Thermuthis with myself! [*Looking keenly at her.*] Yea, thou art mad!

ZIPPORAH. [*Scornfully.*] Perchance I have caught it from thy sister——!

MOSES. [*Sternly.*] Nay, Miriam—if she be mad—is mad with God! This is other——! But perchance it will pass, and I will not hearken. I have too much to do——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Tempestuously.*] And I too have much to do! [*Threateningly.*] Yea, and thou canst take upon thyself what I do!

MOSES. [*Starting.*] What meanest thou?

ZIPPORAH. [*As before.*] Thou wilt *not* stay in Egypt, even if Pharaoh—— [*Catching herself up.*] Thou wilt not stay? Thou art *sure*——?

MOSES. I will not stay!

ZIPPORAH. Even if he begged thee [*falling upon her knees*]—as I—upon his bended knees——?

MOSES. [*Pulling her to her feet.*] Thou art mad, Zipporah!—or an evil woman! I am done!

[He goes out, right, shutting the door with emphasis behind him. Left alone, ZIPPORAH *rapidly dries her tears, and after nervously toying for a moment with the booty on the table, listens intently at the door, left. Then, stealthily, she draws out the rod, and fingers it gloatingly.*

ZIPPORAH. [*Softly to herself.*] If he knew——!

[There is a slight noise in the room, left, and ZIPPORAH *has barely thrust the rod back into her dress, when the door, left, opens, and* MIRIAM *enters. She has exchanged her sombre attire for a rich mantle of scarlet, and across one arm hangs a cloth of gold which glitters as it is caught by the fire of the Passover. In one hand she holds an open jewel-box, which reveals the gleam of precious stones. In the other, she holds a brush and a box of spices, and a shield of burnished brass, the ancient mirror of early peoples. At sight of her,* ZIPPORAH *starts and cowers away, a tawdry thing in her promiscuous finery.*

MIRIAM. [*Not looking at* ZIPPORAH.] Moses is gone?

ZIPPORAH. [*In open-mouthed amazement at* MIRIAM'S *glowing beauty.*] Yea!

MIRIAM. [*Preoccupied, seating herself beside the table.*] I would be alone before the Passover——!

ZIPPORAH. [*Nervously.*] I, too, Miriam! It would be well if thou shouldst stay in thy chamber!

MIRIAM. [*Spreading out the jewels before her.*] I will finish here!

ZIPPORAH. [*In growing alarm.*] But I too wish to be here! I was here first! I——

MIRIAM. [*Sombrely.*] What is the Lamb to thee, thou woman of the land of Midian?

ZIPPORAH. [*With attempted virtue.*] I told Aaron I would attend to its roasting!

MIRIAM. I will attend thereto!

ZIPPORAH. [*Desperately, trying to sound casual.*] If thou hearest aught—if any should come——

MIRIAM. [*Flashing her a look.*] Who should come?

ZIPPORAH. [*Defiantly.*] Moses my husband will presently return! He will wish to find me here!

MIRIAM. When Moses returneth he will tell thee!

ZIPPORAH. [*With frightened obstinacy.*] I promised Aaron thy brother I would attend to the bitter herbs——

MIRIAM. [*Crossing to the hearth.*] And I have told thee *I* will attend thereto——!

ZIPPORAH. It is not thine alone! It is the Passover!

MIRIAM. [*With swift exultation.*] Yea, the Passover of the Children of Israel——! [*After a moment, as* ZIPPORAH *still lingers, fidgeting, she adds imperiously.*] I would be *alone——! [With a last look toward the door, right,* ZIPPORAH *goes out, and* MIRIAM, *kneeling before the fire, makes some necessary adjustments. Then, again, she seats herself at the table, in such a way as to face the audience, and, taking a great gold chain from the box, winds it about her neck. Softly, regarding herself in the shield.*] Not yet! My hair, first, fragrant with spices!

[*Solemn and austere in all her movements, she removes the chain, placing it before her on the table. Then she loosens her long, dark hair; for some moments, with long, luxurious strokes, she brushes it, still looking in the shield. Slowly, she pours in spices from the box. Then, leaning eagerly forward to study each new effect, she decks it with jewels. With a glance at her slender arms, she selects four heavy bracelets from the box, and fastens them upon her. Then she winds the gold rope about her neck. Rising slowly, she folds the cloth of gold over the scarlet of her raiment; then, with a deep breath, and with a rapture so free from self-love as to seem holy, she speaks, in tense exultation.*

MIRIAM. Oh, I am beautiful! I, Miriam, on the night of the Liberation,—beautiful unto Jehovah!

[*There is a rustle outside, right.* MIRIAM, *still absorbed, seats herself, and is placing another jewel in her hair, when the handle of the door turns, and a man stands on the threshold. Without looking up, taking it to be* MOSES, *she says, "Is it thou?" But as the tall form of a masked man, clad in Egyptian garb, enters, she starts up, as if aware of an intruder. Without a word, he softly shuts the door, then, as if in response to a subconscious will, still wordless, takes a step toward her.*

MIRIAM. [*Sharply.*] Who art thou? [*As he says nothing.*] Entering as a thief in the night?

EGYPTIAN. [*Half choking.*] Gods——! I did not know——!

MIRIAM. [*Contemptuously.*] So——! Thou art from the Palace!

EGYPTIAN. [*Not taking his eyes off her.*] Yea!

MIRIAM. From Pharaoh? [*As he nods, she goes on, scornfully.*] He thinketh he can yet avert the destruction? [*As he is still silent, imperiously.*] Speak! What wouldst thou? And why masked? Thou coward! My people would not harm thee! They bear too great a contempt for Pharaoh to harm his messenger!

EGYPTIAN. Say what thou wilt! When Pharaoh sent me he knew not——

MIRIAM. [*As if challenging her own doubt.*] Thou art Epiphras! I thought as much! Poor coward——! The Hebrews say thou hast ever feared me!

EGYPTIAN. [*Slowly.*] Yea, I have feared thee——!

MIRIAM. Then go! Thou seest thy mask is not protection! I am not blind!—nor deaf! Go, ere I frighten thee yet more!

EGYPTIAN. [*Coming a step closer.*] Thou canst not frighten me! [*With gathering passion.*] To-night I am beyond fear!

MIRIAM. [*Her face changing.*] What? "To-night?" When thou knowest what will befall——? [*As he is silent.*] Oh, thou thinkest I will pity thee——! That I will pity Pharaoh——! [*With scorching hatred.*] Pharaoh——! Thou art come to ask Moses——

EGYPTIAN. Nay, to ask Moses nothing! [*Approaching.*] Oh, I know he is hence! And Aaron! I made sure of that! I came not for Moses——!

MIRIAM. [*Breathing quickly.*] For what, then?

EGYPTIAN. [*Slowly.*] To offer the half of a kingdom for thy people——

MIRIAM. [*Scornfully.*] For the bondage? Pharaoh sent thee for *that?*

EGYPTIAN. Nay, it is no matter! I came not for what I come! Thou shalt have the kingdom, thou alone, with Pharaoh! [*Passionately, putting out his arms.*] Oh, gods, gods, but thou art beautiful! Thou, decked as for a bridegroom——!

MIRIAM. [*Very low.*] Thou art not Epiphras!

EGYPTIAN. Nay, no slave am I—nor servant—or only thine, Miriam! [*Quickly, before she can stop him.*] Ah, Miriam, Miriam, thou witch-woman—I that have loved thee since thou wert a child [*trying to take her in his arms*], and forgot—until that day of the thick darkness, when thou didst dance before me——!

MIRIAM. [*White with anger.*] Pharaoh! Thou art Pharaoh! [*As he flings off the mask.*] Pharaoh, and thou darest to come here before our holy feast——

PHARAOH. [*Trying to seize her.*] Yea, for mine own feast! The feast of thy lips, virgin for a king!

MIRIAM. [*Trying to beat him off.*] Let me go!

PHARAOH. [*Laughing softly.*] Nay, Miriam, now that I have found thee!

MIRIAM. [*Blazing, motioning him away.*] Thou shalt not have my lips! My lips that have cursed thee to Jehovah!

PHARAOH. [*Trying to approach her.*] Yea, Miriam!

[*He is about to embrace her when suddenly there comes, as from a distance, a thin, shrill sound, like the ghost of a cry.*

MIRIAM. [*Her mind compelling him.*] Hark——!

PHARAOH. I hear naught——! Thy lips, Miriam, thy lips, sweeter than the lips of Isis!

MIRIAM. [*As the cry again comes, this time audible to* PHARAOH.] Go, Pharaoh——! Get thee to thy Palace!

[*At her voice, he shivers, and, starting suddenly quite away from her, he stands, listening as if with an inward ear. His eyes full of horror, he turns to her.*

PHARAOH. [*Hoarsely.*] What is it?

MIRIAM. [*Holding his terror.*] Thou knowest!

PHARAOH. [*With effort.*] Nay, it is naught! [*Taking a step toward her.*] 'Twas only in thy mind, Miriam! Thou tookest my fear for a shield!

MIRIAM. [*With a low laugh.*] Nay, Pharaoh, never have I taken fear for a shield! Thou knowest what will befall! [*Imperiously.*] Get thee gone!

PHARAOH. [*Stepping toward her.*] Let it take me in thine arms, then! Death the Destroyer! And let Osiris laugh when he finds me marbled in the arms of Miriam!

MIRIAM. [*Sombrely.*] He cometh for Osiris, too, oh, Pharaoh, —my God, Jehovah——!

[*As she speaks the Name, a curious, shrinking change seems to come over* PHARAOH; *his passion drops, leaving him old and trembling. Aware that it is over, he turns without a word and stumbles toward the door, right. For a moment after he has gone* MIRIAM *stands, deep-breathing, where he has left her. Then, struck by a sudden thought, she springs softly to the door, left, and with a swift motion flings it wide.* ZIPPORAH *is seen hastily returning into it, from a small door. Leaping after her,* MIRIAM *seizes her by the arm, and almost drags her back into the main room.*

MIRIAM. [*With biting scorn.*] So it was thou, thou, thou!

ZIPPORAH. [*Hysterically clasping* MIRIAM'S *knees.*] Nay! I knew not! I——

MIRIAM. If thou couldst see thy face, thou wouldst not trouble to lie!

ZIPPORAH. I am not lying! I——

MIRIAM. [*Between clenched teeth.*] Thou wouldst have betrayed me unto him! Me, Miriam, unto the Oppressor!

ZIPPORAH. [*Breathlessly.*] Before Jehovah, it is not so! Hear me!

MIRIAM. Thou liest!

ZIPPORAH. It is not so! Thou hast forgotten! Did not I tell thee I wished to be here, preparing the Passover?

MIRIAM. [*Doubtfully.*] Yea——!

ZIPPORAH. And thou didst drive me out!

MIRIAM. [*Slowly.*] That is true.

ZIPPORAH. [*Pressing her advantage.*] Yea, it is! And how could I tell he would come [*with sudden insinuation*], at the moment thou hadst done adorning thyself? Of a truth, Miriam, I think it is I should charge thee with having brought him hither as thy lover!

MIRIAM. [*Her voice dangerously level.*] Have a care——!

ZIPPORAH. Now let me go! I am sick!

MIRIAM. [*Looking at her closely.*] Not until thou hast told me why but now thou wentedst out by the unused door of thy chamber!

ZIPPORAH. [*Defiantly.*] I went not out!

MIRIAM. Pah! I saw thee coming in!

ZIPPORAH. Well, why not? I went to see—if the mark were yet on the door! I feared lest—lest Pharaoh——

MIRIAM. So! Thou knewest Pharaoh was here! And yet thou didst make no effort to drive him hence!

ZIPPORAH. At first—I heard naught! [*With dignity.*] I prayed, alone in my closet! And then,—then I thought thou couldst care for thyself, Miriam!

MIRIAM. Thou art right, there! [*Slowly.*] I know there is something more——

ZIPPORAH. [*Trying to shake off* MIRIAM'S *arm.*] Wilt thou keep me further from my children?

MIRIAM. [*Scornfully.*] Nay—— [*Then, with sudden bitterness.*] Unless I might keep thee from them forever!

[ZIPPORAH *is about to go, but stops at a sound of feet near the door, left. The door is thrown open, and* MOSES *and* AARON *stand on the threshold. At the joy in their faces,* MIRIAM'S *face changes, regaining something of its previous exultation.*

MIRIAM. Thou hast found the bones of Joseph!

AARON. Yea, Sister——!

ZIPPORAH. [*With a scream.*] Lo! Ye bring Death into the house!

MOSES. [*With displeasure.*] How say ye? We have not touched so much as his burial-place! Do we not know the law? [*Then, in response to the question in her eyes.*] We met with an Egyptian, who was glad to bear the bones for us, seeing it had been Joseph, a friend to Egypt in the olden time! [*He turns to some one outside, who is partially seen, bearing a box.*] Thou canst set it here, near the door! [*As the Egyptian complies.*] Farewell, and may thy gods deal well with thee for what thou hast this night done!

MIRIAM. [*Turning quickly to* ZIPPORAH.] Say naught to Moses!

ZIPPORAH. [*Sarcastically.*] And leave it for thee to say?

MIRIAM. [*In a whisper, as* MOSES *and* AARON *enter.*] Nay! I, too, will say naught!

AARON. [*Taking water from a gourd and pouring it upon his hands and upon the hands of* MOSES.] Cleanse them, oh Jehovah, and they shall be cleansed!

[*Then, in silence approaching the hearth and bending down, they examine the meat.*

MOSES. [*Turning to* ZIPPORAH.] Our children? Are they ready?

ZIPPORAH. [*Sullenly.*] It is late! They sleep!

MOSES. [*In surprise.*] Said not Aaron unto thee, it was the whole household which should eat of the Passover?

ZIPPORAH. [*As before.*] I will fetch them!

[*She is about to, when a terrified rapping is heard upon the door, right.*

AARON. Let no man enter!

MOSES. [*As the frantic sounds increase.*] Nay, I will but see——! Perchance 'tis the message from the Palace——!

MIRIAM. [*Under her breath, as* MOSES *goes to the door.*] Not yet——!

[*There is a whispered colloquy outside, in which the voice of the* 2ND GUARD *becomes suddenly audible in a piteous "I beseech thee!" Shutting the door,* MOSES *reënters.*

MOSES. [*Troubled.*] It is the Egyptian Guard. He hath his child in his arms——!

AARON. Wherefore?

MIRIAM. [*As* MOSES *is silent.*] He would bring it to us for safety?

MOSES. Yea—he saith it is—his eldest!

AARON. As I went about among our people, many told me the Egyptians had already brought their children to be with them this night!

MIRIAM. [*Slowly.*] It will avail naught! Bid him carry it home!

MOSES. [*With hesitation.*] Jehovah hath not spoken thereupon——!

[*He opens the door again, and before he can speak, the* GUARD, *a dim form on the threshold, stretches out imploring arms which hold a child.*

2ND GUARD. [*In agony.*] It is my son! Take him——!

MIRIAM. [*Inexorably.*] It will avail naught!

2ND GUARD. [*Beseechingly to* MOSES.] The mark on the door——! It draweth nigh midnight——! It is my son——!

MOSES. [*Suddenly taking the child which is asleep, and facing them all.*] I too have a son——!

[*The child in his arms, with a sign of silence and farewell to the* GUARD, *he closes the door, crosses the room,*

left, and is about to go into the inner room, when AARON *speaks.*

AARON. [*To* MOSES.] Call hither the servants, for they be all circumcized, and shall eat of the Passover with us!

[*With a gesture of assent,* MOSES *goes out, left. Withdrawing to a retired portion of the room,* AARON *busies himself about his raiment, tightening the loose cord about his waist, exchanging his light sandals for heavier ware; then he puts together certain of his belongings, which have previously been lying upon the table, tied in a cloth, and adjusts the knot more firmly. Placing his staff beside his belongings, he turns to the hearth.* MIRIAM, *and* ZIPPORAH, *too, the former with a tense exultation, the latter sullenly, and with occasional intervals of quiet in which she seems to listen, adjust their raiment, drawing shawls over their heads and shoulders, and placing together in bundles what jewelry is not already upon their persons. In a few moments, girded also, his staff in his hand, a child on either side of him, also girded,* MOSES *emerges through the door, left.*

MOSES. [*To* AARON.] The servants gather themselves!

[*For answer,* AARON *turns from the hearth, and motions* MOSES *to come to him.* MOSES *obeys; and they both stand, facing the household.* MIRIAM *has drawn the children on either side of herself, trying, as best she may, to keep them from* ZIPPORAH, *who, with increasing nervousness, sits fidgeting upon a seat. Again, the door left opens, and some half-dozen male servants silently enter. They are attired in Hebrew simplicity, girded, and bearing upon their backs a number of household articles and spoils. Each carries a staff in his hand. At sight of them* AARON, *slowly, but without hesitation, as if in response to an inner need for ritual, turns, solemnly takes the lamb, the herbs and unleavened bread from the fire, places them upon a great platter which is at hand, and again faces the household.*

AARON. [*In a resonant voice.*] Behold, oh Children of Israel, —your Passover!

MOSES. [*Facing them and half chanting, as do both throughout the ensuing ritual.*] For thus saith the Lord, even the Holy One of Israel; I will pass through the land of Egypt this night,

and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment.

AARON. Also He saith: And when I see the mark upon the lintel and upon the two side posts, I will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you!

MOSES. And it shall be for a sign unto you upon your hands, and for frontlets between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth.

AARON. Yea, and this night shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever!

MOSES. This is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the Children of Israel in their generations. [*Then, raising his voice in a loud chant which is presently taken up by the entire household, some of the members, as by common consent, taking their oboes and flutes from the table.*] In our distress we cried unto the Lord, and he heard us. Our help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer our foot to be moved; he that keepeth us will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to the teeth of the Egyptians. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

AARON. Hark ye to the ordinance of the Passover: Ye shall eat the flesh of the lamb on that night roast with fire [*tasting the flesh*], and unleavened bread [*tasting the bread*], and with bitter herbs [*tasting the herbs*] shall ye eat it. [*He hands the dish to* MOSES, *who, first partaking of it as* AARON, *hastily carves it, and carries it among them all as* AARON *continues, with uplifted voice.*] Ye shall eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof; ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning.

MOSES. [*As the household continues to eat.*] And thus shall ye eat it [*turning, with appropriate gestures to his own raiment*]: With your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

AARON. There shall no stranger eat thereof; in one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house.

MOSES. Your lamb shall be without blemish. [*Then, slowly, as if he were grappling with something he does not understand.*] Neither shall a bone of him be broken——!

[*Then, as they finish, a silence falls upon them; and suddenly, out of the almost unbearable tenseness, there comes, on the midnight, a terrible cry.* MIRIAM *first, followed by one after another, rises spellbound, until they are all upon their feet, listening with an emotion in which exultation struggles with terror, leaving, in* MIRIAM, MOSES *and* AARON, *only exultation.* ZIPPORAH, *shivering with fear, bows herself, rocking to and fro, oblivious of the whimpering children at her knee. For some moments the cry continues, the sound of a multiple grief, the anguish of a people. At length it changes to a low wailing.*

MOSES. [*In an awe-stricken whisper.*] Jehovah is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge!

AARON. And now he will send for us—even Pharaoh——!

MOSES. Yea, verily, this night we shall go forth!

[*As they look from one to another, there is a soft sound at the door, right. They start, violently, as* MIRIAM *runs to open it.*

ZIPPORAH. [*Frantic with fear.*] Nay—open it not! What if it be the Destroyer?

MOSES. [*Reassuringly.*] Nay, woman! Let her open it!. For against any of the Children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, for the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel! [*Signing to* MIRIAM.] Open, Sister!

[MIRIAM *opens the door, revealing, muffled in a long cloak, the* PRINCESS THERMUTHIS.

MIRIAM. [*Turning, astounded, to* MOSES.] It is the Princess——!

AARON. Nay, it is not possible!

MOSES. She hath come alone——?

THERMUTHIS. [*Very low, from the threshold.*] Yea, Moses, I am alone! None would come with me!

MOSES. Thou comest from Pharaoh?

THERMUTHIS. Yea! And he is urgent upon thee to come quickly, thou and Aaron!

MOSES. [*Slowly.*] For what, Princess Thermuthis?

MIRIAM. [*As* MOSES *and* AARON *turn from her in brief consultation.*] Thou art unharmed?

THERMUTHIS. Till I bring them to Pharaoh! After that—here, I think [*pointing to her breast*], there is death! When I heard that great cry—— [*She breaks off; then, before* MIRIAM'S *astounded eyes, she draws* AARON'S *rod from her cloak.*] Take it—for there is treachery in thine house, Miriam, even as in mine! [*Then, as* MIRIAM *turns incredulous eyes upon* ZIPPORAH *and again upon* THERMUTHIS.] Nay, ask me not! I know only Pharaoh hath had it to-night!

MIRIAM. To-night——? But——

THERMUTHIS. [*Quickly.*] Nay, ask me not! I think he thought there was sorcery therein! For ere the cry came, throughout the last hour, he hath stood thus upon his throne-chamber [*she raises the rod as in exorcism*]—and then—then the cry came—and Pharaoh bowed himself! Give it to Aaron! I think there may yet be need thereof ere ye reach your Promised Land!

MOSES. [*Turning to the household.*] We return presently! See ye are ready!

[*Silently, the servants file out, followed by the children.* ZIPPORAH, *who has not seen all that has passed between* MIRIAM *and* THERMUTHIS, *but has caught a word here and there, stands avidly watching, while* AARON *and* MOSES *turn to the door, right.*

MIRIAM. [*Handing* AARON *the rod.*] Thy rod, Brother!

AARON. [*Taking it in surprise.*] My rod! I had not marked I was without it!

[*He goes out, right, saluting* THERMUTHIS. MOSES *starts to follow him; then turns calmly, and takes* THERMUTHIS' *hand.*

MOSES. Farewell, Princess Thermuthis!

THERMUTHIS. [*With quiet emotion.*] Farewell, Moses! I shall think of thee this night——!

[MOSES *goes out, and* MIRIAM *suddenly folds* THERMUTHIS *in her arms.*

MIRIAM. Oh, thou, thou——! That thou hadst been an Hebrew, Thermuthis!

THERMUTHIS. [*Gently.*] Oh, Miriam, I have been myself——!

MIRIAM. [*Significantly.*] Thou art more faithful than his wife——!

THERMUTHIS. [*Gently disengaging herself.*] Farewell, Miriam, my sister! And think of me when we are both hence——!

[*She goes out and* MIRIAM, *with a sigh, stands quiet a moment, looking out into the night, from whence, at intervals, comes the sound of subdued wailing. Then, shutting the door, she strides over to* ZIPPORAH, *who has been sitting cowering in a corner.*

MIRIAM. [*Through white lips.*] Say naught——! I could not bear it! Nay [*as* ZIPPORAH *makes as if to speak*]—not one word! And as thou lovest thy life, say naught to Moses thy husband!

[*Terrified into silence,* ZIPPORAH *goes out, left. Alone,* MIRIAM *stands as if pondering many things. At a sound upon the door, right, she goes forward with a muttered "So soon?" She opens it, and instead of the anticipated figures of* MOSES *and* AARON, *she starts back in amazement as* DATHAN, *the slave, wild and disheveled, falls at her feet.*

DATHAN. [*Moaning.*] Kill me! Kill me! In mercy, kill me!

MIRIAM. Who art thou? [*Then, as she recognizes him.*] Oh, it is thou—Dathan!

DATHAN. Yea, it is Dathan! [*Attempting to grasp her feet.*] Oh, thou woman that scornest me, I rejoice thou art here! For thou wilt kill me! Thou hast ever hated me! [*As she makes no sign.*] Oh, I implore thee, take my life away!

MIRIAM. [*Sternly.*] Hence! To thy household! Knowest thou not yet we go forth this night?

DATHAN. Oh, here where death aboundeth, is there no death for me?

MIRIAM. [*Motioning him to his feet and away.*] Hence! And crave forgiveness for speaking such words upon the Passover!

DATHAN. [*Shiveringly.*] There was no Passover for me!

MIRIAM. [*Starting.*] What meanest thou?

DATHAN. [*Gasping.*] My wife—Shelomith——! The Destroyer hath her!

MIRIAM. [*More gently.*] Nay, thou art mad! The mark upon the door preventeth him!

DATHAN. There was no mark on my door——! I went to Pharaoh—— [*His voice rising shrilly.*] I went to Pharaoh, I tell thee, to discharge my debt against Moses thy brother whom I have hated since that day—ah, thou knowest! [*He rushes on, his desperate eyes compelled by her stern, unflinching gaze.*] Yea, for treachery I went—and I made no mark upon the door—and when I returned, she was there, and I decked her with the jewels Zipporah gave me for my service, and——

MIRIAM. [*Irrepressibly.*] Zipporah——?

DATHAN. [*Dully.*] Yea, Zipporah, the wife of Moses! [*Hurrying on.*] Yea, and she was beautiful, my wife Shelomith—and she would have forgotten I did not avenge her! She would have forgotten! And then—then——

[*He breaks off, shuddering violently.*

MIRIAM. [*In a low voice.*] She is dead?

DATHAN. She lieth alone upon her bed, behind that door where there is no mark upon the lintel!

MIRIAM. [*Motioning him away.*] I have naught for thee! Hence——!

[*He goes out, right, dazed. For a moment* MIRIAM *seems about to open the door and call in* ZIPPORAH, *but as the servants begin to come in, left, she changes her mind, and stands watching them in their final hurried preparations. Suddenly* GERSHOM, *crying bitterly, runs into the room, and flings his arms about her.*

GERSHOM. Aunt Miriam! Aunt Miriam! The little Egyptian——

MIRIAM. [*Very gently, drawing him close.*] Yea, child! What of him?

GERSHOM. [*Sobbing.*] He sleepeth so sound! I cannot awake him——!

MIRIAM. [*With deep pity.*] Let him sleep, then, child! Perchance he was tired from his play——!

[*There is the sound of a multitude of feet. Then, through the window, rear, appear faintly the figures of hurrying men and women. A clear cry of command, in the voice of*

MOSES, *"Hasten!" startles* GERSHOM *into forgetfulness of his grief, and he runs to the window.*

GERSHOM. [*Looking out.*] Oh, Aunt Miriam! Look! Look! There is Father, and a very great multitude!

ELEASAR. [*Running in and joining* GERSHOM.] And cattle! Aunt Miriam! Look! Yonder in the road—the flocks and herds father hath asked Pharaoh for so often——!

GERSHOM. [*Beginning to laugh.*] How funny they look! Aunt Miriam! Some of the men have kneading-troughs upon their backs, bound up in their clothes!

ELEASAR. Look! Even the children carry spoils! [*Snatching his own from the table.*] Oh, Aunt Miriam, I want to start! I want to get the milk and honey!

[*The door, left, is flung open, and* MOSES, *the light of freedom upon his face, stands on the threshold.*

MOSES. [*Beckoning the servants.*] Hence! With haste—to the Promised Land——! [*Catching something of his spirit, they turn and go out, quickly, right. Then, turning to* MIRIAM, *surprise in his voice.*] Where is Zipporah?

MIRIAM. Within——!

MOSES. [*Striding to the door, left, and flinging it open.*] Zipporah! Make haste!

[*She emerges sullenly, seems about to protest, but at sight of* MIRIAM, *changes her mind, and goes toward the door.*

ZIPPORAH. [*Pausing at the threshold.*] My dough—not yet leavened——!

MOSES. [*Impatiently.*] Take it unleavened, then! So do the other women! [*As she hesitates.*] And make haste——!

[*Sullenly, she gathers up some cakes on the hearth; then, her packet of jewels in her hand, without a look at* MIRIAM, *goes toward the door.*

MOSES. [*In consternation.*] And thy children, Zipporah?

MIRIAM. [*Quickly, before* ZIPPORAH *can speak.*] Thy children, Moses, go forth with me——!

[ZIPPORAH *goes out, and* AARON *reënters, right.*

AARON. Come, Moses! The people clamor that we go forward at once to lead them!

MOSES. Yea, I but waited for thee to help me with the bones of Joseph!

[*He is about to go when* AARON, *in sudden fear, turns to him.*

AARON. Brother——! Perchance Pharaoh will yet set upon us!

MOSES. [*Impatiently.*] Nay, the Egyptians are urgent upon us to depart!

AARON. But when we are beyond Rameses—how shall we know the way? It is naught but wilderness——!

MOSES. [*Restlessly.*] Jehovah is with us! Surely He shall guide our feet even in the way of the wilderness——!

[*As if in answer to him,* MIRIAM *steps to the window, then, with a cry, she points to a great light outside.*

MIRIAM. Lo——!

AARON. [*Seeing the light.*] Behold—Jehovah hath sent fire upon all the land of Egypt——!

[*He goes back, into the room.*

MOSES. [*Resolutely.*] We must go forth! Surely He shall lead us——! [*Then, as in reassurance to* AARON.] Perchance it is the dawn——!

MIRIAM. [*Turning suddenly to* MOSES.] Oh, Brother, look——! It is not the dawn——! Nor is it fire upon the earth! It is in the heavens! Lo—a great pillar above all the people!

MOSES. [*Wonderingly, as the light suddenly bathes* MIRIAM.] A pillar of fire——!

MIRIAM. [*Taking a child by either hand and motioning* MOSES *and* AARON *away.*] Go——! I will watch here a moment!

[*The box which contains the bones of Joseph between them,* MOSES *and* AARON *go out, greeted with a subdued clamor from the people, who, presently as with one voice, begin to chant the mighty psalm of the Exodus. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped." A moment passes,* MIRIAM *and the children silently watching. Then, as she sees* MOSES *and* AARON *pass to the head of the procession, and as the pillar of fire moves forward.*

MIRIAM. [*In exultation.*] Lo—it moveth——! The pillar of fire! We are led by a greater than Moses and Aaron! Jehovah leadeth us——! Jehovah leadeth the Children of Israel——!

[*The curtain descends, as they go out, bathed in the light.*

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